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THE WAR IN SPAIN

THE WAR IN SPAIN

A Personal Narrative

by

RAMÓN J. SENDER

Translated from the Spanish by

SIR PETER CHALMERS MITCHELL

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"No more traditions' chain shall bind us.

Arise ye slaves! No more in thrall!

The earth shall rise on new foundations

We have been naught: we shall be all!

(The International)

"The worst sin towards our fellow-creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. That's the essence of inhumanity." — George Bernard Shaw.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Ramón J. Sender, who honours me with his personal friendship, is still under forty. He is the most distinguished of living Spanish writers, and by many, including myself, is regarded as one of the most distinguished living authors of any country. He comes of a landholding, land-cultivating stock in Aragón, and was educated at a monastery school and then at Saragossa. At the age of eighteen he went to Madrid to study law, but like many young intellectuals of this century, his conscience was disturbed by the condition of the working-classes in town and country, and by the complacent belief of the holding classes that their interests were identical with the interests of the country, and that they were exercising a moral duty in defending them even by violence. Sender joined in the agitation of University students against the Dictator, Primo de Rivera, and escaped imprisonment only because he was under age, and his parents, strong Catholics and conservatives, undertook to take charge of him. In due course he did his military service in Morocco, and drew on his experiences of the horrors of a misconducted war for his book *Imán*, published in English translation under the title *Pro Patria*. On his return, he settled in Madrid, worked as a journalist and author, and in the Ateneo, the famous intellectual club of Madrid, came in friendly contact with the leading Liberal thinkers and politicians of Spain. But he began to take an increasing interest in the efforts of the Spanish proletariat towards self-conscious organization, and in the ethics of their reactions to the virulence with which they were treated by the Government of 1934. The last time I saw him personally was in Spring of 1936 after the electoral victory of the Popu-

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lar Front. I spent some time in his flat, in a high block overlooking the Zoological Gardens, a flat which reappears in several scenes in this book. It was a gay home of life, love and laughter. His young wife, a musician and member of a Catholic family, his two children respectively of two years and a few months age, and his own affectionate and tolerant nature made a picture of domestic happiness which I can never forget. Sender has begged me not to add a word of comment on what he has written in the last pages of the last chapter of this book. He was very unwilling even to mention his personal tragedy, but he came to think it his duty, in a few reticent lines to open the sorrow of his own heart as an instance of the sadistic cruelties brought on Spain by the rebels.

A few weeks later Sender wrote inviting me to join him and his family on the high sierra near Guadarrama, in August. He had taken a cottage and promised me a welcome, a comfortable bed, plain food and mountain air. The rebellion made that impossible.

During my visit to him in Madrid, Sender told me that he thought a rebellion would take place against the Popular Front Government, but, not foreseeing the effect of the active intervention of the Fascist Powers and of the equally active 'Non-intervention' of Great Britain and France, he thought that it would be suppressed once for all. As a man of true democratic spirit he admired the rectitude and extremely unvengeful tolerance of the Government, no member of which would have passed for more than a mildly socialist Liberal in Great Britain. But doubts were arising in his mind as to the practical wisdom of tolerance, and he was drawing closer to the parties of the extremer Left, and, apart from the ideologies concerned, his mind was being prepared for the course he actually took, of fighting in defence of liberty shoulder to shoulder with the artisans of the cities and the peasants of the country, whether these were anarchists, syndicalists, communists or intellectual bourgeois.

The first chapter of the book describes the atmosphere in Madrid in May, interpreted after the rebellion, then in active preparation, had begun. The rebels proposed to

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recover by violence what they had lost in a popular election and had assured themselves of the active sympathy of the Fascist Powers. The explosion came whilst he was in his cottage, at Guadarrama, so that from the first days he was under fire. The whole of the book is a narrative of his personal experiences, at the fronts and behind them. When the end has been reached it may be possible for some laborious historian, sifting information from many sources, to give some sort of coherent picture of the whole scene. Sender has done less and better. His is a personal narrative of what he saw with his own eyes. It is the work of a great writer, a poet and psychologist who is a man of extreme personal bravery and a passionate admirer of a people fighting for bread and freedom and in defence of the liberties they thought they had won by peaceful democratic means. Much of the book was written in the trenches and the manuscript was revised for the Press on short leave in France, given partly for that purpose and partly to allow him to arrange for the care of his orphaned infant children.

P. CHALMERS MITCHELL

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CHAPTER I

MAY IN MADRID

On a May morning in 1936 a Spanish captain came to see me who had been serving in the Foreign Legion in Morocco. He had recently been deprived of his command as the result of political plots. He had been hardened by African campaigns and was about five-and-thirty years old. He spoke violently, employing a civilian phraseology which we who had been through the Morocco campaign of 1923-25 easily distinguished from 'Red-Hat' language. The captain was a member of a liberal organization and with others in Melilla had founded the Anti-Fascist Military Union to counteract the growing influence of the 'Spanish Military Union', which was preparing the July rebellion. As the formation of military organizations of a political nature was forbidden, both unions had been conducted secretly.

To those who were not dreaming in idealism, reality in Spain was very different from official reality. And so the confused words of the captain seemed to me to deserve attention, although they did not merely suggest a danger, but prophesied a sure cataclysm. His visit was not the first. After I had seen and heard him on a former visit, I had told him:

'They won't pay attention to you.'

He wished the Minister of War to reinstate him, but the Government would rather have resigned than have ordered the Judge-Advocate at Melilla to alter his decision on any political grounds. The Spanish democrats have displayed a correctness truly ingenuous. After the electoral victory of the Popular Front our democrats luxuriated more than ever in

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their correctness. The feeling gave an internal satisfaction of an extraordinary kind about themselves and others, and kept boisterous and simple people like our captain from crossing even the ante-rooms. It is sad to recognize that the correctness appealed especially to those rascals, the sub-secretaries. I had introduced my friend to a colonel in the War Office and indirectly to the sub-secretary of the President of the Council, although I knew that both of these would think that I was obstinately keeping acquaintance with persons who were not responsible. Unhappily I turned out to be right. The colonel and the sub-secretary received my friend with Castilian frigidity and sent him on to the secretaries, which was as good as sending him to the devil. The secretaries got rid of him with polite phrases, and in a month after he had reached Madrid he had still failed to communicate his valuable information to anyone. According to that the changing of a dozen military commands would have been enough to suppress the insurrection in Africa. But the very word 'insurrection' was improper, and every time the captain uttered it in the Ministries I am sure that someone glanced at his watch and smothered a yawn with polite insolence. Our friend would repeat:

'If they would restore me to my command, I'd answer for the loyalty of the troops.'

'It is the commander who is responsible for loyalty to the flag,' they would reply in the Ministry.

'But it is the commander who is going to revolt.'

He might even have gone on to add: 'When he does revolt we'll suppress him, and I'll take over his command.'

The poor captain didn't understand that such language was quite out of place at a time when Spanish republican politics were lost in an idyllic dream. In the end they thought him mad, and me, for having introduced him, an irreverent joker.

In fact, nothing was easier than to foresee a danger which confronted us at every step—in the street, in the clubs, in the syndicates, in our own house. Some German Nazis lived in the flat above mine. They held political meetings there in the most open way. We had to try to keep them quiet by the ingenuous method of reminding them of the municipal regula-

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tions. Other neighbours tried to annoy them by turning on their loud-speakers as loudly as possible when left-wing political speeches were being transmitted. 'Incidents' were frequent in the streets, sometimes with bloody consequences. The republican authorities left these to be dealt with by the ordinary tribunals, and when stronger measures were proposed, as for example the establishment of a political police with extraordinary powers which could be effective even in remote villages, they lifted up their hands in dismay and repeated fine words about universal suffrage and true democracy. They kept saying that even those who had voted for Gil Robles were Spanish citizens.

The great author, Valle-Inclán, who died a little before the outbreak of the war, said to me one day as he was gazing sadly at the people from the terrace of a café:

'In the last thirty years Spanish life has improved very much. Watch them. The men and the women are much better looking now than when I was young. Physical beauty is more frequent in Spain than in other countries. Health, joy in life, intelligence have gained all the ground lost by religious fanaticism. We are now one of the most cultured, most beautiful and most healthy peoples of Europe. It is sad to think that we are going to lose all that in the next few months. What a pity!'

He described the blood, the starvation, the horrors of civil war. We thought that he was exaggerating. As for me, although certainly I came into life this century when it was possible to have baths and to buy books, and did not know Valle-Inclán's generation, I thought his fears far beyond reality. But how prophetic were his words! And not only in these matters but in his predictions about Franco's relations with German and Italian fascism and other details of the war which was so close to us. With eyes dimmed by prophetic vision he repeated:

'What a pity!'

Now we mourn these words as we see our Spain wounded, made vile and put up to auction. But I confess that sometimes when I was ready to accept the prophecy of the great author, I saw something good in it. The day when the anti-social

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forces of Spain make their effort, surely, thought many of us, they will be crushed. Why? Because on the one hand we saw the calm, serene and resolute growth of the organizations of our artisans and peasants, first under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, and afterwards under the Republic, until our workers were among the most capable and the best organized in Europe. It was the growth of a vigorous social block within which life raised movements more or less tumultuous, but none of which menaced a democratic State. And alongside there had arisen a multitude of parallel currents in which were contained a great part of the lower middle classes and even of the liberal capitalists. Perhaps because in our time feudalism was segregated in a special social stratum—under the huge landowners and other local property-owners—broad zones of the bourgeoisie were with us in everything that made for the advance of civilization and progress. And it must be remembered that Spain is a country in which these conceptions still count for something. Some of these zones were with us, even if not very vigorously, as in the case of Basque capitalists. Outside the Basque regions, when it was seen that the war with feudal Spain was not going to give a liberal bourgeoisie culture from elegant tribunals, but that the workers would be the dispensers and that moreover they would have to range themselves with proletarians and peasants in the fight, they became afraid of losing the initiative and the control, many of them withdrew and perhaps are now fascists.

Many artistic, cultural and intellectual tendencies which were part of the current of growth of artisans and peasants attracted some of the Spanish lower middle-class youth. They were all agreed on the fundamental need of preserving at any cost the conquests made by the workers, as upon them the impetus Spanish life had gained depended in every sense. It was necessary to secure political liberty, to unwind the tentacles of the Church from the people's organs of power, to preserve once for all the right and civic duty of discussion—on the practical side liberty of speech and of printing, to secure it, compelling the obedience of the feudal landowners who had always considered themselves outside and above the State, and wished to retain their privileges even after the coming of the Republic.

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Most Spaniards agreed with all that, and it was beyond even doubt in the most industrialized regions—the south-east, Catalonia, the Basque country, Santander, Asturias, and in the two Castiles—Madrid was a sure proletarian bulwark. What could we have against us?

And so when my reaction to Valle-Inclán's melancholy reflections was the idea that there would be a good chance of crushing the enemy, I was not falling into childish optimism. To crush feudalism, and the Church as the organ of the feudal caste, did not mean carrying the effort so far as to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, even if, as the Spanish communist party asserted with complete confidence, the crushing of the enemy would be achieved by the workers and peasants. All of us, in thinking of crushing feudalism, were thinking of the democratic Republic. The anarchists themselves agreed with this, in which we all explicitly or tacitly concurred. All through our struggle this spirit has predominated, as it was the real meaning of our cause.

In view of such facts what were our obstacles? They were not insuperable, considering the fighting spirit of the organizations and the heroism of the people. We had to face the Church, although that did not mean that persons of religious spirit were our enemies; a part of the army, and the great landowners recently united with high capitalism through the agrarian party (Martinez de Velasco), Acción Popular (Gil Robles), and the Monarchical Traditionalists (Carlo Sotelo). The whole of the army was not with them and clearly a divided army is not a decisively adverse factor. I recognize that we had not dreamed that they could buy an army with their money (the Moors and the Foreign Legion) or with pieces of our national territory (Germans and Italians). The oversight was due to our belief that the struggle would not last long enough to make an atmosphere favourable to international intervention. And also because none of us could have foreseen that the democratic powers of Europe would permit such acts of political vandalism. The halting virtues of the Society of Nations and the uninspired bureaucratic prudence of Geneva far surpassed the imagination of Spanish liberals.

Naturally, our optimism was not absolute. We knew too

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well that our republican good faith, our clean morality and our respect for law would have to face the lawlessness, insolence, cynicism and gangsterism of our enemies. I have not yet referred to two organizations; the Spanish Falange and the Requetés. Although they were few numerically they had weight—the money of those who inspired them and the active stimulant of the recent fascist triumphs in Germany and Italy. The latter rather upset the landowners of Acción Popular and of the Agrarian Party who were like a hen that has incubated a duck's egg and sees the duckling plunge into the water, but in the end they found in them a new and useful quality. This quality was the spirit of conspiracy and combativeness. In the case of the improbable triumph of Franco these organizations would be exterminated by the victors, although they had been the spirit of his rebellion. But the Falange and the Requetés knew their importance and both opened a campaign to torpedo the Popular Front by calumny, crime and abuse. Since Hitler and Mussolini have shown that cynicism and treachery are more successful in politics than in private life, and that they can lead, perhaps not to a stable result, but at least to surprise and temporary successes, no one can be astonished that fables of Bolshevik plots, accusations of Russian spying, and of terrible schemes attributed to the republican leaders found ready credence with the ignorant feudalists, contemptuous of civil power, and always ready to be deceived by any who seemed ready to defend them, especially if they were in the uniform of their historical allies, the Army and the Church. They allowed themselves to be influenced by the fascist calumnies to such an extent as to make possible the following letter, written from the Escorial by a marchioness to her daughter, who lived in a mansion in Serrano Street, Madrid:

'The Escorial

May 7, 1936

(with a Cross above)

'Dearest daughter,

'I ought to have written to you days ago but the restlessness of these calamitous times just as often turns me to the

MAY IN MADRID

oddest things as it keeps me from the simplest things. I don't know whether to tell you to come here or to go to you. You must know that here after the triumph of the mob, due, as the son of don Celo tells me, to the gold of the Moscow heretics poured out in the elections, the town council has changed. The former council, presided over by that man C., went with pistols and paid assassins and threw out the council of the Ceda,¹ beating and martyring on the staircase Dr. N., a poor and most worthy old man. I hear that the situation in Madrid is worse and that the Government appeared on the balcony of the Presidency and promised the mob that they would have the revolution this month. And so I don't know whether to go to you or ask you to come here, as all that I want is that God in his mercy should take us, and together. I am ready to die if that is the divine will. May we always be ready to die if that is the divine will. May we always be ready to make ourselves worthy of His mercy.

Your Mother.

'P.S.—I forgot to tell you that your little nephew Miguel, who is still in his ninth year, said yesterday to the porter's son, who had greeted him with the fist held up, that if he saw him making the socialist salute again, he would kill him. When Irene told me about it, I nearly wept with emotion. See what a religious education does for one!'

While such aristocratic old women and the large land-owners were expecting death, convinced that the Popular Front were sharpening their axes, Azaña and the Cabinet were taking prudent counsel how to carry out agrarian reform without detriment to the old rights, and the Ministry of Agriculture was raising new loans to indemnify those who were expropriated.

The Falangists and Requetés at the same time set about trying to excite discord within the labouring class by crimes against the directing syndicates. The low numerical strength of the fascists, I repeat, was compensated by their activity

¹ During the 'Black Biennium', presided over by the Lerroux Government, most of the popularly elected councils were replaced arbitrarily by managing commissions which, in their turn, fell on February 15 (after the elections), to restore the legal councillors.

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and intensive organization. On the other hand, there was a fact of crushing significance in our favour. After six years of demagogic work among the labourers and peasants, the fascists had been unable to form even the most elementary syndical units although they had recourse to the remnants of the 'yellow' syndicates organized under the monarchy by Martinez Anido from the social wreckage of Barcelona. Fascists, the only really dangerous elements (for they would throw stones against generals, bishops and aristocrats), had no social basis and were scarcely a part of the real Spain.

Under these circumstances, and as the working-class organizations all through Spain were trained by constant mobilization, we regarded the possibility of a military insurrection with some inquietude because of the disorders which a movement of the kind would bring, but with confident hope of victory. We did not doubt but that the Popular Front Government would arm the organizations of the workers, and with these conditions one would have been thought almost mad to doubt that the rebels would be beaten all through Spain within a week.

Our friend, the Foreign Legion captain, repeated, speaking of the Government:

'They won't recognize that they are on a volcano.'

I asked him if he were going back to Morocco and he told me that he was not going there to be caught like a rabbit, but would prefer to remain in Madrid awaiting events. •

We had not been considering the Church as a serious enemy. That was one of our mistakes. It came from the fact that in civil life the most obvious supporters of the Church were bourgeois women and old men, elements not much in the habit of organized action. They had not yet come to understand that the political activities of the Church required their help. Besides, their meanness was notorious. Until the new constitution of the Republic separated Church and State, none of the faithful was accustomed to give money in the churches, and no one asked for it. When the priests saw that the diocesan pay-rolls were coming to an end, they made it compulsory for everyone who entered a church to give something for the faith. One day I saw the lady owner of the block

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of flats in which I lived, a block worth more than fifty thousand pounds, stop in the church porch and ask a flower-seller to give her two halfpennies for a penny as she had not change to pay her due. The Church was servile with these gentry, and if it contrived to extract money from them—no easy task—it was by indirect methods. The most successful was education. The child of every respectable citizen had to be educated by monks or nuns, and they paid the school fees without haggling, boasting about the advantages of an expensive school. The reputation of religious education, proclaimed by the clergy, had created a set of myths among the upper and lower bourgeoisie. It was impossible to have any social standing unless one had been educated by the Augustinians or the Jesuits. I must relate an anecdote showing what sort of thing that religious education was. I was living opposite the Retiro (a large park in Madrid). Coming in and out, I used to listen to what the children were saying and often was rewarded. One day I was close behind a clerical tutor hand-in-hand with a boy of seven years who was asking odd questions.

‘Are the brains of sparrows eaten?’

The priest answered without thinking:

‘Yes.’

‘And ducks’ brains?’

‘Of course.’

‘And those of lambs?’

‘Certainly.’

The little boy stopped for a moment and then asked more anxiously:

‘And human brains?’

The priest started.

‘What nonsense!’

But the boy hurried to explain—

‘I don’t mean the brains of people like you or papa,’ and added with contempt, pointing with his slim finger to a poorly dressed workman on a bench in the sun: ‘I meant the brains of that sort.’

The priest began to laugh and patted the boy’s cheek without answering. I felt the horror that the priest should have

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felt. The child's question revealed the moral state of his class, of the bourgeoisie influenced by the Church. I believe that my anecdote reflects the contribution of religious education to the cynical class prejudice which is the chief support of fascism.

In these days the streets belonged to us. The victory of the Popular Front had made an atmosphere friendly to the working classes. In Madrid and in the provinces they wore their rough clothes and their heavy boots with dignity. Starvation wages had disappeared, the legal wage had been restored and masters were fined if they did not respect the social regulations made in the first two years of the republic. Workers were in an atmosphere of optimism and security; but the fascists were active day and night among the bourgeois and feudal classes. By crimes and calumnies they succeeded in alarming the conservative sections. The flight of capital and speculation against the peseta began. Everything was done to increase the fears of the rich. Conspiracies were carried on openly in the barracks.

What was the vital factor in those days? The following: in the two first years of the republic the petty bourgeoisie had tried to make a democratic revolution. They failed, and fell from power. The reactionary parties (Ceda, Agrarians, Traditionalists) tried to keep the Republicans from power even by terror (Asturias, 1934) and were unsuccessful. The electoral victory of the Popular Front (February 16, 1936) put a stop to them and gave the workers' organizations their historical opportunity. The workers took part in the Government openly, and set about doing what the republican parties failed to do, and what the reactionaries could not stop. They set about making the bourgeois democratic revolution.

At the beginning of July 1936 we were all in confusion and anxiety. Like everyone else, I expected the explosion. As it seemed that the military had not decided and as the state of Madrid was enervating—victory, the hurry to organize it, the need of consolidating it, the joy of having routed everything in Spain that represented reaction, dirt, barbarism and death—I, who didn't know how to begin to work in such an atmosphere, went to the country. I took a little house within less

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than a mile of San Rafael, a summer resort of the wealthy Madrid bourgeoisie among pine forests behind the mountainous mass of Guadarrama. I had been there before. As I supposed that it would be a nest of vipers, I did not put the lease in my own name, and I gave my address to nobody so that letters would not come to me. Now and again I went to Madrid to collect my mail and reply to it. San Rafael is two hours distant by train from the capital and actually is in the province of Segovia, whose boundary with Madrid runs along the high crests of the Guadarrama. I was far from imagining the importance to be taken by these lovely landscapes in the civil war and in the most intimate events of my life.

EXPLOSION

CHAPTER II

FIRST CONTACTS

When there are dark zones in our anxiety, forebodings, it is impossible to put them out of mind. Something calls to us, we don't know why or whence. And so a pistol came with my books, and, in a few days after my arrival, the painting of the fascist emblem near my garden proved that bringing the pistol was not merely a romantic notion. After that I could do nothing in San Rafael except read the newspapers and listen to the wireless. I could not work. It seemed that my engagements were going to be broken by forces beyond my control. But I was far from suspecting what would happen. And thus a few weeks passed. When I could bear no longer the green pines, the blue sky and the dull-eyed cows (to all of which I am more resistant than most people) I went back to Madrid. When I found nothing to do there, except to sing the glories of the Popular Front, which would be doing no more than adding literature to a fact splendid in itself, and plain to everyone, I went back to my holiday home. San Rafael is a town of hotels, most of them hotels-de-luxe, on the two sides of La Coruña high road. My modest house was more than a mile and a half from the last of these. In front of it the mountain rose towards high, almost inaccessible crests covered with pines, between which a tangle of brambles, ivy and creepers blocked the way. Some sixteen square miles of almost virgin forest covered the region. On my walks I sometimes came across grass-snakes of a bright crystalline pale-green, and other small creatures. Wolves were reported to be there, and at dusk wild boars came out to feed. The town,

EXPLOSION

which began lower down, climbed up on both sides of the high road towards the Alto de Leon, the summit of the pass, by which the road ascended by hair-pin bends between pine-clad hills. That part of the Guadarrama separated us completely from the other slopes, covered with summer resorts, pretty villages and luxurious sanatoria. The railway traversed the ridge by a wide tunnel which opened on the south to Tablada and on the north to San Rafael. On the other hand the high road which crossed Alto de Leon led to a town which also bore the name of the mountain, Guadarrama, a mile or two lower down. Like all these towns of the sierra, Guadarrama was a charming group of bourgeois hotels and houses.

I passed several days waiting, like everyone else. I had a sense of isolation almost painful. I was deeply and directly interested in everything and I could not sleep for the feeling that something was about to happen. But how was it going to happen and where? In Madrid no one knew anything and everyone interpreted things in his own fashion. In San Rafael I saw some *grandees* of the aristocracy or of the monarchical party slinking about like poisoned rats. Their fear amused me. 'We are all in danger of our lives,' I said to myself, 'but *we* have the advantage that it is nothing new to us. We are accustomed to it.'

And so I amused myself on the terrace of a restaurant which had the same name as a restaurant-de-luxe in Madrid, seeing to my right and my left much uneasiness and fear.

The Marquis de San N., with a grey suit over his pyjamas, and his comical old face reddened with cosmetic, was always seeking a chance of flattering the civil guards, calling them 'Sir'. The Civil Guard, a creation of the monarchy, notorious for the cruelty with which it acted, had barracks in San Rafael with some thirty men under a lieutenant. As a rule the Marquis de San N. would have employed them to do messages for his family, but now the fear of danger made him not only flatter them, but even sometimes treat them to beer. He did it in a notably heroic fashion. The old liberal, R. V., a butt of all the *élite*, who had broken a lance against the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, passed from group to group, putting on a wise face and saying, with the suspicion that

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they did not trust him, that he was studying phenomena of the crowd which were quite new to him, and that he was feeling quite a different person. 'The community *en masse* has no creative power,' he kept saying. 'The idea of the Crowd', he added, with a great mental effort, 'excludes every vital activity capable of creation.' If those who were listening to him seemed to remain suspicious, not because they had formulated any definite judgment about him, but merely because his words appeared nothing but a superfluous courtesy, instead of waiting to be ridiculed, he hastened to make a jest at his own expense. To make a fool of oneself is sometimes the best way of not getting oneself made a corpse. And so R. V. would say something very silly, the others would laugh, and he would pass to another group.

I seldom went to the town, and, if so, usually to buy newspapers. But I took care not to be well known in the town, and certainly not to attract attention. Most of the time I was in my garden, or reading in my room, or taking a sun-bath on the highest rocks of a little hill called El Estepar, a mile and a half from my house in the opposite direction to San Rafael. In other years I used to merge myself at once in the landscape, and I passed delicious hours of work or of rest. But this summer I found nowhere in the mountains a place where I could sit down and watch a cloud through a leafy branch. I was as poisoned as the Marquis de San N., but the poison in me was positive, affirmative. My hate and my resentment, if I had them, which is doubtful, because for many years I have sublimated these in intellectual conceptions, were as simple, spontaneous and natural as the opposition of a salt to an acid, and, like that, were positive facts. As I had much time to myself, I analysed my feelings. 'Was it fear?' But what was fear in the case of R. V. in my case was simply the restlessness of the needle in the presence of the magnet, until it found the north.

The Marquis de San N. and those who consorted with him believed that a crusade of blood and fire was about to begin against the following dangers—institution of social services and the protection of labour which with us were more backward than in France, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Sweden, Norway,

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Finland, the United States. Taxes on incomes lower than in any other country in Europe except Portugal. Death duties, infinitely lower than those paid in England. Reversion to the State of common land usurped by the great owners. Vesting in the municipalities of the right of using such land for pasturage, firewood, etc. Cancelling of the old seignorial rights of the magnates in favour of the municipalities and local authorities. Separation of Church and State, in the details of which the republic had shown extreme benevolence since 1931. Development of the plans for agrarian reform under which the great landowners had already done very lucrative business with the State itself. In short, the liquidation of the old feudal section for the benefit of the wealthy bourgeoisie and for the general prosperity of the country. Against all these the Marquis de San N., and R. V. (who when Rector of the University of Saragossa recommended those who had just finished their medical course 'not to forget the action of God', and told them that although 'science was all very well, it was much better to place a holy image under the pillows of the sick'), the aristocracy and the higher clergy clamoured for a crusade of blood and fire. According to a phrase of Gil Robles (which they all accepted gleefully) it would be necessary to exterminate three hundred thousand Spaniards; and as they were all expecting the explosion, their nerves told them that in the explosion they themselves would be in some danger. They glanced round about them in fear. Let these peasants—dirty, hungry, illiterate—continue as they are. The republic would not redeem them, because they would destroy the republic.

The radio brought me the news. The first explosion had burst in Morocco, as the captain of the Foreign Legion had foretold. I breathed quietly, as I suppose most Spaniards did.

The situation had become clear, and that at least was a great relief, whatsoever might come of it. The radio appealed to the liberal and republican spirit of the country. But that, I thought, would not cut much ice. Whole regiments had rebelled in Madrid and the news from the provinces was confused. All the army in Africa was in revolt. My only contribution to the defence of the republic during the first thirty hours



Alcalá de Henares, Tomb of Cardinal Cisneros wrecked
by the Enemy Aviation

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was to remain at the radio with my hand on the tuning control, letting filter through my excited senses the speeches, the decrees and the statements from one camp and the other. Certain details led me towards comprehension of the situation. Seville-Radio threatened to shoot all the leaders of the syndicates if work in the city were not resumed within three hours. The terrorism which the movement employed from the beginning was intelligent in its ruthless cruelty. I heard General Queipo de Llano, half buffoon, half executioner, utter his first bloody follies. I recalled a day not long before, in the office of the editor of *La Libertad* in Madrid. Queipo, after having conspired against the monarchy and having drunk cheap liquor in every café in Madrid where secret meetings were held, was appointed chief of the military staff, after the proclamation of the republic, by Alcalá Zamora, another traitor, who may be as much of a fool as Queipo or more, but is much more solemn in his disposition. Queipo still held that post when I met him. Without waiting to know my opinions he spoke out in the most open way, and the odd thing was that he didn't quite believe what he was saying, but was only trying to amuse Joaquin Aznar, the editor of the paper, and to ingratiate himself with me.

'I have lost faith in the republican parties,' he said to me, 'and I am convinced that the only really serious realities are the syndicalist organizations and the workers' parties.'

Thinking that I was a communist, and I have very often been taken for one, and there would be nothing much in that, as I am one, Queipo de Llano repeated:

'I am with you people wherever you go and when you go, but I wouldn't risk even this for the republic.'

He pointed to the edge of his finger-nail and screwed up his Malay face with its twisted moustache. He seemed to me a soldier of the old style, and I recalled, I don't know why, another army chief in Morocco who, when I asked him if he spoke the local Arabic dialect, replied:

'Not much. I know that "jambebe" means "son-of-a-bitch", "citauen" "sodomist", and "Tibarkani" "cuckold". And what more do you need to know?' he added.

Hearing him on the radio, my Spanish feelings were

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wounded to the quick. I suffered from such light-hearted bloodiness over the fate of a part of Spain. I listened to other stations through these anxious hours and came to the conclusion that the rebellion was widespread and of the gravest character. The Government in Madrid took the step too late of demobilizing the army. A week earlier *Claridad*, the organ of Largo Caballero's socialist party, had called for that step as a matter of extreme urgency, but it had been treated as they treated my Moroccan captain. It was too late when the order was given, because the rebels had already taken the troops into the streets and had declared a 'state of war'. I picked up fragments of speeches from both sides. Those of the rebels ended with a litany of menace; those who did, or refrained from doing, such and such things in such and such circumstances would be shot. That was the worst. Terrorism had spread its wings over Spain. That was the only thing that could be done with a kind of skill by feeble minds like those of Queipo, Franco and Mola. Against it, the Government in Madrid had nothing but sentimental appeals for law and order.

There was a moment when I thought that all was lost; when the formation of a Government under Martinez Barrio was announced; a Government of the most moderate party, a confession of impotence of the most lamentable kind—but Madrid reacted in time, and that Government lasted only a few hours. It was followed by another under Giral, but still with the same left republican spirit. Clearly there was much vagueness and nervousness. We seemed weak and vacillating. But towards the dawn of July 19 I heard news on the radio which restored me to optimism. It was a notice of the requisition of private motor-cars by the workers' organizations, revealing that extensive mobilization was beginning. Another announcement spoke openly of the 'people in arms' and of the facilities being given by the Government to arm all who were enrolled by organizations of the Popular Front. These two announcements were decisive. I went out to go to the telegraph office to place myself under the orders of the Governor of Segovia. Before getting there I tried to find out what was happening in the province, and sought the two local directors

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of the General Union of Workers (U.G.T.), one of them a railwayman, the other in charge of central-heating in a sanatorium for tuberculous children. We fraternized at once. They told me that the governor of the province had already been shot by the rebels, who were now masters of Segovia. The civil guards of San Rafael had left in two motor lorries the night before, to join the rebels. I could not offer myself to the authorities at Segovia as they were in rebellion, but at once I got in touch with the representatives of the Government in San Rafael. I went to a hotel close at hand where the family of Señor Giral, the head of the new Government, was spending its holidays. I spoke with the son-in-law, and told them where I was to be found if there should be occasion for my personal services. Next, I saw the Director-General of Mountains, a professor of natural science and an old friend of mine, who also was spending his holidays in San Rafael in a forest station. We agreed that something would have to be done to organize local resistance, in case rebel troops should come from Segovia. We would have to choose a front which took the greatest advantage of the natural positions, as it was to be foreseen that help from Madrid might well be delayed, as troops were engaged in fighting the rebellion in the capital. The radio had given us excellent details of the position in Madrid. The people, helped by the loyal aviation, had attacked the chief rebel strongholds, the Montaña barracks and the camp at Carabanchel. The chief foci of the rebellion inside the capital had been subdued, but there were still minor ones, and no one knew what might happen. We had had a number of definite advantages. Two rebel generals had fallen in Madrid. Another, in Barcelona. Sanjurjo, a regular soldier in whom the Spanish reactionaries had placed their confidence since the day after the proclamation of the republic, had been killed in an air accident as he was leaving Lisbon. That was very important, especially the nature of the accident, in view of the superstitious spirit of the reactionaries.

We had to fix the front line on the crests of the Alto de Leon, about two miles behind my house. It was necessary to concentrate as many men as possible on that place, with arms or without them. Arms might arrive from Madrid, or we

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might capture them from the enemy. In any case our peasants and workmen must come out from the north slopes. The more came to the Guadarrama side, the more soldiers we would take from the rebels, even if they were unable to fight on our side.

A single incident will show the insecurity of these hours. Two automobiles with an escort had been sent from Madrid to protect the family of the President of the Council. In each were six police. Five had hand machine-guns and one had a full-size machine-gun in a leather case; the possessor, a stout and elegant gentleman with a bloated face and an eye half-closed, guarded it as lovingly as if it were a violin. These two vehicles kept passing backwards and forwards, and their occupants tried to appear to be only tourists. I spoke to them several times and am glad that I spoke with a similarly unconcerned air, as not for a moment did I think them loyal to the Government. In the evening of the 19th the railwayman came to me to say that all the men ready to fight had gone to the palace of Count de L., about two miles away in the depths of the country, to search the house, in the belief that they would find arms. If that were the case, they intended to arrest the family. I regretted that decision as the mansion was less than twenty miles from Segovia and there might easily be a disaster. And so it happened, although forces arrived neither from Segovia nor from anywhere else. Machine-gun fire was opened against our men from a mysterious vehicle when they were deploying round the mansion. Eight men were killed and five-and-twenty remained wounded in the country. The others came back to San Rafael, not understanding what had happened. They were telling the police escort about it when I came up and realized at once that the man with the half-closed eye had fired against the peasants. The incriminating piece was an empty cartridge-reel which they had forgotten to throw out, lying at his feet. The 'gangster' pulled down his shirt-cuff, ascertained that his elegant hat was firmly on his head, and said, shrugging his shoulders:

'It is not possible. It must have been an ambushade. We have just come by that road and have seen nothing.'

When he said that they had just come by that road, he was

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addressing me, who had just seen the vehicle returning. Naturally I pretended to be convinced. But I told the peasants to distrust these police and to watch them. We settled then that all of us should go to Guadarrama and put ourselves at the orders of the Popular Front committee. Three or four of the more obstinate stayed behind. At night a lorry arrived with civil guards and with them the officer in charge of the post at San Rafael. At first we thought that they might be the vanguard of a stronger column, perhaps on its way to Madrid, but they stopped in the middle of the town in front of their little barracks. Some curious persons went up to them. Two workers with rifles in their hands hesitated. Were they loyal? Were they rebels? Before descending from the lorry the guards fired two rounds against the group, although not a word nor a gesture had come from anyone. Four fell dead. The others fled, going into the nearest houses and closing their doors. Only a young lad stood impassively in front of the lorry. The man of the machine-gun went to the lad and seized him by the arm. The workman freed himself violently, looked at him proudly, saying:

‘Don’t touch me! What you have done is a cowardly crime.’

The officer began to shout hysterically:

‘This is their leader. Leave him to me.’

Thrusting the gun against him and making him raise his hands above his head, he forced him to the entrance of the central telephone station, and, when he was on the threshold, fired two shots with the weapon pressed against him. The body remained where it was the whole of the next day.

Realizing their danger, and although no one had fired a single shot at them, they collected the families of the guards who had stayed behind in the barracks and whom no one had molested, and went off to Segovia again. At the same time two tourist coaches arrived from Valladolid with fascist young gentlemen summoned by the frightened Marquis de San N., R. V., and other reactionary worthies. The same night the Director-General of Mountains and his wife left the town and came across country to my house. A few minutes afterwards the young gentlemen from Valladolid, wishing to

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have pistol practice without risk, arrived at the Forestry Station.

As may be imagined, we did not sleep. We all kept close to the radio. Some comrades kept telling us of the nearness or the remoteness of the Falangists. We smoked, commented on the march of events, and played on the tablecloth with my cartridges, arranging them as letters or stars. When dawn came, we heard that they had been searching for us. They were not hunting for me as a writer, or because of my name—I had taken care not to let it be known—but as a republican, secretary of a ministry. The latter flattered me, because I, who have lived a varied and agitated life, have always thought myself fit for many professions, but absolutely without qualifications for that one. When I was told about it I wondered what there could be in my appearance to justify my being taken for a ministerial secretary.

But the day brought new disasters. There was fighting in Andalucía, in Galicia, in Barcelona. Through the windows and the shining green of the poplars, the pure mountain air reached our lungs like a caress. And it invited us to go out. But it was now late for that. We could not go out except to get away. The high road passed through the middle of the town and was in the hands of the fascists. We should have to cross the mountains. I had a plan, but it was not the moment for plans. We were awaiting something concrete and definite which would force itself on us and make us take a decision. The director-general was ill, and so felt the seriousness of our situation more deeply. And I felt it more through him than for myself.

It was nine o'clock when I went into the garden. I was in my shirt-sleeves with my innocent camera in my hand. I went out to the high road. Some groups came near without hurry, talking with animation. There were women amongst them and that gave me confidence. One group came close to the hotel. I pricked up my ears:

'It was time,' said a youth of twenty years; 'now they'll learn the kind of people we are.'

A girl, his sister or sweetheart, started:

'But if they win?'

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The youth used the customary dramatic phrase:

• 'They will pass over my dead body.'

He spoke shrilly, raising his girlish arm clad in a pretty silk jersey. His group joined with another. They all questioned each other with their eyes. I listened more closely, pretending to be arranging some plants. I heard them speaking of the Segovia batteries (the Artillery School was there), and of battalions. Then a thin old maid cried out excitedly:

'Heavens! How splendid!' and added, 'Long live Spain!'¹

They all called out together. The cry wounded me to the heart. I should have liked to go out on the road and call to the woman:

'What do you know of Spain, poor woman? When have you toiled, or loved, or suffered on this land of ours? What do you know of Spain except its confessionals and its banks? I have walked over it, climbed its mountains, and traversed the plains of Castile step by step. I have given my blood to this country, my smiles, my loneliness and my enthusiasms. No one has given her more or asked for less from her. I ask no more from her but a place for my feet and her soil to cover me. My mother is under her soil. In her I have my being. In the intangible air, in the unlimited space, on the land itself are my children, my poems and my dreams. I am Spain. Her grandeur and her misery. Her soul and her body! Within me the rocks of Spain, her birds and her air speak, as now there speak in me the rifles of the militia and the blood of the labourers murdered last night. What do you know of Spain, madam?' ✓

I went back to my house and said to my friends:

'Within a quarter of an hour we must decide.'

We had to cross the forest, plunge into the mountains, climbing towards Guadarrama parallel with the high road. If the road had not been cut by the fascists, we could have reached Alto de Leon in an hour, and Guadarrama in another half-hour. Going by the mountains it would probably take us twelve hours, up to nightfall. I warned them that we could take no baggage. A quarter of an hour afterwards, the Director of Mountains said:

¹Franco's battle cry.

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'I have made up my mind to start, but my wife insists on coming with us.'

'Good! Let her put on her thickest shoes.'

We went out separately in case of accidents. The two, arm-in-arm as if for a stroll. I, leisurely, with my camera carelessly in my hand, whilst in the town the fascists were going from house to house asking for the young secretary of some ministry.

We rejoined in the wood and about half-past nine took cover, as far as possible from the high road and the town. In less than ten minutes we saw on the road more than a hundred lorries carrying a column of some four thousand men. From our post of observation we saw on the last lorries a number of heavy cannon as well as six or eight mortars of 15.5. More lorries in convoys of three or four came up from time to time. I wished to take notes of what I saw, but as there was a chance that we might be seen and captured I had to trust to memory. We crossed pasture grounds with young bulls less dangerous than the occupants of the road, we climbed down into torrent-beds and began to descend again through steep hills covered with pines and scrub, always keeping roughly parallel with the high road so as to approach Alto de Leon, where the first shock would have to take place if the column tried to get through the pass. We kept at a distance of about a mile and a half from the road, sufficient in a region so broken. Suspicious noises made us stop every now and again and hold our breath. One of us always followed the more open ground so as to keep an eye on the road. About noon we had climbed nearly to the level of Alto de Leon. It seemed that the column had stopped in the town. We could hear hurrahs from crowds. They expected to enjoy themselves. We sat down to rest. Under the sun, perspiring and tired, we began to suffer from thirst, but no one of us confessed it, to prevent our having to take collective notice of our trouble. We had not yet set out again when we heard the motors of the column starting. We listened intently. The Director of Mountains, lowering his voice as if they might hear him, asked me:

'What strength have we in Alto de Leon?'

'Very little, but the peasants of the district, with their old

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guns and about a hundred rifles which arrived yesterday, might hold the front for a few hours, the time necessary for reinforcements to arrive from Madrid.'

But it was not certain that they could resist the column. I awaited anxiously for the first shots, so as to guess at the fate of Guadarrama and our own fate. A well-known general, Mola, commanded the division. It was to be supposed that fascists would have been informed in San Rafael of what to expect at Alto de Leon. And if so it was possible that before trying to force the pass they would destroy our trenches with their artillery. But although all the workmen and peasants had known for three days what was happening at Alto de Leon, some two miles from San Rafael, not a single fascist knew about it.

They suspected that the road had been cut, but nothing more. That they had not ascertained the facts, in spite of the universal eagerness for sensational news and their curiosity, showed that the two sides occupied well-defined areas. I expected to hear at any moment the first cannon shots. If they began with artillery it was very probable that they would break our weak front and pass on. In that event we could not go to Guadarrama as it would be occupied by them already; we should have to walk all day and all night, going out of our way, towards the mountains of Avila in the direction of the Escorial, although we did not know in whose hands that might be. It might be that the fascists would receive us there.

But the first shots came from our trenches. As the column did not know the exact position of our defences, it intended to go straight on. Our men, waiting in their trenches, let them approach and received them with close fire. Thinking about Mola, I said to myself: 'He may have a great military reputation, and yet be a fool.'

'Now it has come, now it has come,' I repeated.

'What is it that has come?' asked my friend.

'Nothing. That they will not pass.'

CHAPTER III

FLIGHT ON THE SIERRA

The struggle began with heavy losses on the rebel side, as we held a great advantage in position; the rebels had to improvise their attack, and it was more than an hour until they put their first gun in position and used their superior force, time enough for the arrival of our aeroplanes. I spoke too optimistically, and my friend, who apparently put little confidence in my military science, listened to the firing, very suspiciously. I said, showing him my watch:

‘It is now half-past twelve. You will see that we won’t hear a single cannon-shot before two o’clock. And before that, our aeroplanes can and will arrive.’

I added that our aviation would hinder the action of the enemy’s guns, as its job was to blow up the munition lorries and the petrol tanks, and to hinder or to disturb emplacement of the guns. In any case the first encounter had given us an advantage, but before two o’clock in the afternoon we ought to move from these heights and go down the opposite side of the hill, as it was certain that the artillery would open its fire on that site to prevent our men filing off to the flanks, abandoning their first position.

‘But why should they abandon it?’ asked my friend.

‘That is simple. They could not hold out against the fascist artillery.’

They have the best artillery in Spain in these Castilian cities (Valladolid, Segovia), and the gunners are as good as the best in Germany.

The Director of Mountains did not reply. He only hastened

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his steps, from which I inferred that he was taking my limited military knowledge more seriously.

'Do you like war?' he asked me.

'Who can like war?'

We continued descending. His wife had bruised feet and her legs were scratched and bleeding. When we consoled with her, she smiled and said:

'It is nothing.'

She was worried over her physical inferiority and by her wish not to make things more difficult for us.

We went on talking about the war. A mile and a half to our left, beyond the pines, we heard the firing of heavy guns.

'War is an art,' admitted my friend.

'Yes, a minor art.'

'In spite of the complications of modern war?' he asked after a pause.

'In spite of all these, war is still made as Hannibal made it. The technique of general staffs is a subsidiary element, and not that, but intuition, the genius of the leader, wins battles. In the middle of our civilization a shepherd may turn up, perhaps not very intelligent, but with imagination, and will beat all the generals. Of course our shepherd requires the reports which a good general staff can give him, in the fashion of a good office. War is a primitive art, and the spirit determines and animates it. The devotion of cultured people to field-m Marshals in civilized countries is a barbarous and infantile superstition.

These views surprised the Director of Mountains, but he began to like them better as they might encourage scorn for the monster growling a few metres to our left.

We were leaving the rifle fire behind. The fascist machine-guns could be heard more frequently every minute, and their continuous fire dominated the noise of battle.

We were now descending the other slope. Seas of pines, abysms green with broom, separated us from the Spanish-American sanatorium, a magnificent building rising up in a clearing of the forest at the foot of the mountain, less than a mile from Guadarrama, the town which we could see now and again from a height. We sought for water, guided by the

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sound of a spring. We found it, drank and went on comforted. But we must hurry; the artillery will sweep all these places. .

Two aeroplanes appeared on the horizon. Ours. We sat down to wait, hidden in the shadow of a pine. They passed over our heads and on reaching Alto de Leon descended in a wide curve. As they were on the north slope, they disappeared from sight, but at the same moment we heard two loud explosions. Then two others. Sometimes we heard their machine-guns, quite different in sound from those on the ground, quicker and more mechanical. Perhaps because their sound was finer, it could be heard from a greater distance. My prediction had turned out correct; all three of us became optimistic in spite of our weariness and hunger. As my friend was a sick man, I had to put before him what might be called our objectives, time after time, to keep up his morale as a fugitive. We had to reach Guadarrama by night-fall. We had hardly made half the distance. The aeroplanes kept discharging their loads. We pictured the long file of lorries blown into the air, dissolved into sparks—with a satanic joy.

About three in the afternoon, long after the aeroplanes had returned to Madrid, the first fascist cannons could be heard. Three or four shells fell on the little hills we had just left, to the right of Alto de Leon. Great clouds of smoke and dust rose above the green pines. We hurried on. Half an hour afterwards the rifles and machine-guns seemed to be changing their positions. Then three of our aeroplanes came and shed their bombs on the other side of the mountain. We must hurry. A gain of three minutes might be decisive.

We hoped to reach the town and to secure some kind of car, which, as we calculated, would take us to Madrid in less than an hour. That is to say that my friend, who had a political post under the Government, meant to go to Madrid with his wife. I had decided nothing. When my fate concerns myself alone I prefer to wait events and to let things as they may happen at the moment decide what to do. During my life that plan has often brought me into great danger but has also got me out of it in unexpected ways in which determination and improvisation have proved their value. But when the

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consequences of what I may do affect others I am extremely cautious over even the smallest details, and try to forget my own system altogether. If I had been asked then what I wished to do, I should have said: 'Let us see if a shell is not going to kill us; afterwards get to the town a little before the fascists. Once there, the new circumstances, the circumstances of the night, would be all we had to consider.' That seemed better than to hesitate between presentiments and guesses.

Let us hurry!

Nearly all the way now was downhill. In the middle of the afternoon we came on a mule-track, one of those made by resin gatherers to take their loads out of the depths of the forest. We followed it and came on to some houses hidden in the pines. They were one-storied huts arranged in the shape of a 'T'. Although linen was hanging out to dry, the doors were closed and the huts were empty. The inhabitants had fled as the noise of battle came nearer. We pushed on. The sun set. Sunsets up there have an astounding grandeur. The sky is scarlet with broad stripes of blue, white and purple and golden cirrus clouds, and on the other side, towards the east, a quiet sea of cotton-wool with waves of rose and mother-of-pearl. Under that vault, the cannon-fire and the rattling of the distant machine-guns were in crushing disharmony.

I was proud of my peasant comrades, less than three hundred all told, lacking cannon and machine-guns, who from ten in the morning until now had held back a mechanized column. I said so to my friend, who replied:

'With that spirit we are bound to win.'

It was a half truth. With that spirit, with some munitions and with organization, no doubt. I said so, and we agreed that the situation of the loyal forces was very far from brilliant.

'Certainly if war were carried on now as in the days of Hannibal', my friend insisted, 'man-power would count for much, and we have more and better men than the rebels.'

'Of course,' I replied. 'The French reserves kept the war going until the armistice, and they could be said to have won it.'

But these reserves were well-armed. The help of England,

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and especially of the United States in the last stages of the war, joined with the perfect supply of munitions and other armaments with which these reserves were provided, put the French army in conditions very different from those of our forces. We shall do well enough if we can secure a rifle for each man. These we cannot do without. The aristocrats have staked on the war the fate of their feudal privileges; we, and with us all the small industrialists, the intellectuals, the men of liberal professions, artisans and peasants, must triumph to save our lives. There is no need to manufacture a great propaganda in the style of Mussolini or Hitler to convince the masses of that. They all know it by instinct. 'We cannot lose,' repeated my friend as if to convince himself.

'If we lose,' I added, 'our defeat will be the beginning of disaster for all Europe. All western civilization was born from liberty and has developed parallel with democracy and the liberty of the people.'

My friend did not believe that the war would have so wide a scope.

'It hasn't that now, but it will have it,' I replied. 'If we were well provided with arms, or even if we could get them by using the right of a legitimate Government to seek them, and buy them, the rebellion would not grow. But if our unit, instead of being the battery or the squadron, is the "man", the war will last long and will sway, and that will complicate the international situation.'

The firing had spread behind us. The situation on that slope was confused. At one time I thought that the fascists must have outflanked our line and were entering the town or dominating it from a height. I listened intently but could not hear any noise such as comes from the second line of a front. All was deserted and silent in the dusk, under the indirect light of the sun, now far below the horizon, reflected from the sky; abandonment and desolation seemed to rule. Each distinctive colour had faded, the luscious green of the trees, the bright grey of rocks, the flat ashen tint of the lichens, and even the scarlet blood of my friend's wife. But the correct black of the clothes of the Director of Mountains, inconspicuous in the riot of daylight, now seemed the dark nucleus

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of night. We shivered under the damp rising from the gorges, and our weary bones ached.

The last stage was the longest. On our left we saw the Spanish-American sanatorium, on a wide expanse swept by the evening breeze now turning to the gusty wind of war. A few little hills separated us from the town. At the sanatorium, the resin-gatherers' track opened into a wide tourist highway. Less than a mile lower down, the tourist road opened into the high road from Guadarrama to Alto de Leon. When we had come to the level of the sanatorium we were less than a mile from the town. It was half-past seven in the evening. Although it was the line of communication with the front, which must now be in the town itself, the roads were all empty. We could not hear a single motor. We hesitated a moment, but the constant rattling of the machine-guns left little time for doubt, and we agreed to follow our first plan. We hurried on. An unarmed soldier came down by the right side of the sanatorium. He saw that we had the tranquil appearance of tourists, and it was he who addressed us first, asking:

'Where are you going?'

'To Guadarrama. Why do you ask?'

The soldier shrugged his shoulders:

'You had better hurry,' and added, although none of us had asked him: 'I have come down here with a message.'

A few hundred yards lower down, the road joined the Alto de Leon highway. To our left the high mountain slopes were black already. The shining sky was reflected on the curving asphalted road as if in a river. The battle was raging up above us, two miles or less away. I thought that if the fascists could capture a position on the south slope they would be able to sweep the town at their will with their machine-guns. Guadarrama lay along the foot of the mountain. Its tower with a large stork's nest was well below the smallest of the foot-hills. We hurried, just not running. As we came out on the high road we met two armed soldiers, running. They were coming from Alto de Leon. I didn't know that we had regular soldiers there, but supposed that they had been sent from Madrid. All the same these soldiers might belong to the

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fascist vanguard. We were uncertain. When they were alongside they stopped. They also asked us where we were going. They saw that we were unarmed and had the unconcerned appearance of tourists, and they were reassured. We gave the same reply; that we were going to Guadarrama. When we questioned them they excused themselves; they had had no water all day, and the ammunition was finished. They had no artillery.

We saw two packets of cartridges abandoned on the road. Some yellow reels of five cartridges, thrown away, were lying near. The soldiers went on excusing themselves.

'The officers have abandoned us.'

One of them told me:

'My captain has deserted to the enemy.'

They belonged to one of the railway regiments, judging from the emblems on their collars. They told me that they had arrived at midday with their battalion, sent from Madrid to reinforce the peasants who were resisting the fascist column. It appeared that more than half of them had been killed. As they saw that we were not very cordial, they went off quickly. One of them came back to tell us that if we did not hurry the enemy would catch us before we reached the town. We went quietly and silently.

That had depressed us. Later I understood the episode and others, more frequent in the regular army than with the militia because of lack of confidence in the officers. The old Spanish officer required a king, a final authority with a supernatural halo of divine right, in order to feel himself a part of a war. If all that were the case even after the disaster of Anual in 1921, what would happen now? The most convinced and daring spirit would fail if you were to try to persuade an infantry captain, the son of rich landowners, trained in the Academy under the monarchy, that he must give his life in defence of a juridical entity approved by a popularly elected parliament, and called the Constitution of the State. To understand that kind of loyalty, human dignity and imagination were required. The old officers had no human dignity except that which came from their dress uniforms. Imagination has not been cultivated except by reading the army

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promotion lists, the 'active lists', which announce their promotions, and by the dirty stories of the guard-rooms.

With such thoughts in our minds we reached the town. It seemed a deserted little place. We searched in vain. Not a soul in the streets. The iron gates of the hotels closed. The shutters of the windows closed. We went to the Town-house. No-one there. Over the balcony a flag, not the republican flag, but a white sheet idly flapping in the night breeze. Not a tourist coach nor a lorry nor a bicycle. Clean, empty, solitary streets. Other white flags on balconies were the ghostly mark of fear. We came back. A large red-brick building displayed all over it red-cross flags. The façade and the central building were almost hidden by two massive wings on the level of the road. A pretty garden filled the space between the iron railings and the foundations. Over the principal entrance a scroll with letters carved in stone: 'Sanatorium for Children.' A fine building for a fine purpose. A large red cross was painted on the roof to warn the hostile artillery if they should occupy a post overlooking it that it was the refuge of three hundred children.

It was the only building with open doors and we went there. We met the director, a young man, intelligent and self-possessed. They gave us food. The nurses wandered about in panic. The director was attentive to everyone in complete calmness. He told my friends that there was not a single coach in the town and that all he could do was to find them sleeping quarters for the night. But who was thinking of sleep? Beyond the conversation we were all listening to the noises from outside. There wasn't a man or a weapon in reserve in the town. All the troops, the few railway militia, had gone up to the front line. In every pause we heard the voice of the machine-guns.

Women, old persons, and children who could not go to Madrid were in the cellars—bourgeoisie who awaited the storm with some resignation. Many of them, perhaps most, sympathized with the rebels and were anxious for their entry. I noticed that, and went back to the director's office hoping for the arrival of troops from Madrid which I could join. It was now very late and I was afraid that the opportunity would not come, or that the director would let it es-

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cape me deliberately, since he had tried to dissuade me. About one in the morning a man came to the chief door. He was a lieutenant of a machine-gun section. Three or four of the sanatorium staff came round him. The lieutenant, in the sleepy and bored fashion which typical Spanish regular officers think the right way of performing their duties, asked for the director. Whilst waiting for him, he answered the questions of the staff with the same indifference. I went up to him in the hope that he might serve my purpose.

‘Have troops arrived?’ I asked him.

‘Yes. Two machine-gun sections.’

‘Are they remaining in the town?’

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders. Everything was worrying him. He faced the facts in the fashion of a doctor confronted with an incurable patient. He was bringing the machine-guns as the doctor would employ a useless drug.

‘It is all up,’ he said at last. ‘I don’t know what they have sent us here for.’

‘What is all up?’ I asked him.

He roused himself and stared at me curiously.

‘The situation is desperate,’ he added.

I reminded him that the radio last night had issued a very different report.

‘Yes,’ he retorted. ‘Do you pay any attention to the radio?’

‘Of course,’ I said, ‘for the Government speaks by the radio.’

‘The Government says what suits it.’

‘But you are forbidden to doubt what the Government says.’

Clearly he was going to be no help for us. He stared at me as if to see if I were wearing any badge, and, perhaps, if I were carrying weapons, and changed his tone. He only meant to say, so he corrected himself, that it was a pity that we had not force enough to crush the rebellion.

‘They have everything,’ he added.

When the director came, he asked permission to place a machine-gun in an angle of the building. The director refused, reminding him that it was a sanatorium and that there could be no act of war under the sign of the red cross.

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The lieutenant agreed without any conviction, it seemed. He went out, disappearing in the darkness, as all the town lights were turned off, and left me wondering in dismay if many of the officers were like him. But if they were as frank and free-spoken, the danger would not be so great, as all that would be necessary would be to take the guns out of their charge. To learn to fire a machine-gun takes no more than half-an-hour's practice, and the second time one is using it instinct teaches one to seek the flank and try to put in a raking fire.

I found an easy-chair in which to sleep, hoping that the hours before dawn would clear up the situation. I slept three hours. When I woke and found that daylight had come, I felt optimistic. The Director of Mountains, who had not slept, came to me; he was yellow, with rings under his eyes, clearly ill.

'We have a car,' he said.

His wife was delighted and kept saying that they would be home in less than an hour.

'Whose is the car?'

They told me something which I could not quite follow because I was distracted by hurrahs in the street, echoed by crowds. I went out and found the town full of militia. There were also assault guards, civil guards, and two or three batteries of light artillery mounted on lorries. In all they must have been three thousand strong. I went back to the sanatorium and found my friends.

'Don't wait for me. I am staying here.'

The firing up above was continuous, but lighter. I went out again and passed through the groups looking for someone who would find room for me. Quite soon I was called by name. The call came from some workmen jesting with two militia girls who were insisting that they should take a second pitcher of milk. They all came quickly to me with their Madrid accent, familiar from old fights in the city. Artisans, proletarians, men more united by syndicalist than by military bonds, small tradesmen, clerks in business and in banks— young men still with 'plenty of youth to burn' all moving about with rifles on their shoulders.

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I met them now under very different circumstances, but they were unchanged. Their discussions, their passions, their ambitions were cleanly free from egoism. Individual right was so merged in the common right, and the purity of aims was so great (defence of all liberties of the people), that neither an individual nor the individual ever appeared. This state of mind in men of incomplete culture, of intelligence not systematically developed, was an important fact not only for Spain but perhaps for the life of the world. It was a pleasure to see it in their gestures and glances, and to hear it in their words. A communist friend and I went about asking questions here and there. No one mentioned the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', and even the anarchists, at least for the time being, had forgotten their 'free communism'. It was simply war to the death against the monster. The reaction of Man against the Beast, the assertion of justice against crime.

Plasterers, carpenters, metal workers alongside civil guards and assault guards. A youth, a newspaper-seller, said to me, pointing to a sergeant of the Civil Guard:

'That man broke my father's arm when he was beating him, in October 1934.'

'And now you are going to fight by his side?'

He looked at me in astonishment:

'If we all think of liquidating our personal wrongs at a time like this, we are done for.'

Two militia girls came to us. They also wore the blue 'mono'¹ fastened with a zipp, and were dragging a metal container filled with fresh milk from the sierra. I asked my friends if there was a sick or wounded comrade whose place I might take. Off they went and soon came back with a third, who looked very ill. He gave me his rifle and cartridge case, and said to me:

'I wouldn't give them up even to my father, but they tell me that they are for you, and here they are. I know I am leaving them in good hands.'

He added that he was going to ask the man who was re-

¹A one-piece suit like a boiler-suit with a belt, much used by members of unions in Spain.

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sponsible for his little group to put my name on the list and to give him provisional leave.

'I'll stay here where I have friends,' he said, 'and try to sleep.'

For three days and three nights his hand had not left his rifle. He was at the attack on the Montaña barracks in Madrid, and at the capture of Alcalá de Henares. I was well pleased. I opened the rifle, saw that it was loaded and put another cartridge, the sixth, in the reservoir. I asked a comrade to tell me who was in charge of everything. They pointed to a lieutenant-colonel, dark, brisk and short, walking about with his adjutants. It was five o'clock in the morning.

The machine-guns on the nearest hills which overlooked the town were silent, although a troop of slingers could have wiped us out. A few groups came down with their rifles unslung, in a deplorable physical state. They were the men of the day before. They exchanged impressions with the lieutenant-colonel, who with his adjutants and three or four militia entered the telephone station.

I watched the militiamen, handling their rifles with affection, approach the professional officers with an easy confidence, and fraternize with many of these in affectionate respect. The good professional officers held the militia in the same affectionate respect. They had seen them many times fighting with a bravery and intelligence which, shown by civilians, must have been a surprise to them. The 'hundred-per-cent' loyal officers could be distinguished at once by the way they joined freely in criticisms and censure of our defects. They thought of them as misfortunes of their own, as faults of the family, and this openness reacted favourably on the militia, who accepted them completely. But there were others, unpleasantly reserved, who came to us only in flattery. They could be seen to be on guard against their own mistrust. These shades were quite apparent even amid the disorder of our improvised encampment. The head of my group came to see me. He had a dirty sheet of paper in his hand. He was a mason of the C.N.T. syndicate. An anarchist. He sucked the pencil conscientiously each time he lifted it from the paper. He put the number of the rifle opposite my name. I was

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impressed by that evidence, trivial as it was, of the attempt at organization, especially in an anarchist. Then I went through the main street, the high road, to see what forces would accompany us. There was a company of the civil guards and two of the assault guards, all in uniforms, close to elegant motor-cars drawn up at the side of the road. A strong contingent of workers of the U.G.T., socialists or communists. Three batteries of light artillery with their officers and complement, and I was told that two other batteries of heavy guns had been left in the rear and were being emplaced. But an hour passed without anything being done. The lorries were still drawn up in the middle of the road with their load of artillery. The column was crowded behind, straggling over the road. No one gave orders. No one did anything except wait. Silence reigned up in the mountain. I asked for the officer-in-command and no one replied or seemed to care about him. The assault guards were excited, wishing to start. The civil guards, who were suspicious, mumbled comments and were silent when a militiaman approached. Another hour passed without any movement. I was disturbed by the silence of the enemy and our own inactivity. The militiamen in my squadron did not seem to bother about anything. Rifles in their hands, they felt masters of the world.

We were going to appeal seriously to the staff about placing the artillery and deploying the troops to positions outside the town, when I heard a revolver shot behind me. I turned round, thinking that some foolish person had fired casually, and saw an old man in uniform stagger and collapse. His revolver bounced on the ground and fell at my feet. One of the comrades picked it up, kept it, and made the comment:

'It is Colonel Castillo.'

Some officers and two militiamen rushed to his aid, but it was too late. I remembered the men of the railroad regiment who were flying the night before. The colonel was their commander. I remembered also the machine-gun officer, indolent and demoralized. Whatsoever might be this colonel's state of conscience, at least it was to be respected. He preferred suicide to treachery. One of my company remarked,

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looking at the revolver, which he was keeping, in a satisfied way:

‘If all the officers who do not understand the people’s cause were to follow his example, we should save a lot of cartridges.’

The logic of the war was becoming elemental, simple and terrible.

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CHAPTER IV

WAR WITHOUT AN ARMY

Two hours later an aeroplane appeared over Guadarrama. It was nine o'clock in the morning. We had heard not a single shot since dawn. All of us were still in the main street, in the middle of the road. They had finished arranging a mobile hospital for first aid, at the entrance to the town near a bridge and a cross-way where five roads joined. I kept on enquiring fruitlessly what we were doing in the town. We had been four hours without moving, apparently without a plan or an objective. We were using up our enthusiasm in songs and jokes.

'Are we going to a war or to some procession?' asked a soldier accustomed to delays of many hours at reviews or celebrations.

When the aeroplane appeared we all saluted it, raising our rifles. 'It is ours.' Some, more prudent, suggested that we might be mistaken. When I saw that it was circling over us I thought that it might be indicating the position of our column to the hostile heavy batteries. I kept silence, as it would have been useless to say so. Besides, the pilot shook out a red flag and made a signal by two revolver shots. The aeroplane was not military, and that made me suspicious in spite of the red flag and the revolver signals. When it had fulfilled its purpose, it threw out two bombs. One on us, the other on the posts where the telephone wires of several towns in the sierra crossed the high road. Neither of the bombs hit its mark. The one intended for us fell three yards away on the other side of the concrete rim of the road, in a garden. In less than a

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minute, more than three thousand rifles were fired. Some of them were aimed at the quickly vanishing aeroplane. Others were directed blindly at open windows or suspicious doors, as many of the militia thought that the attack had come from the centre of the town. When calm was restored, nerves were still on edge.

‘What are we doing here?’

‘Where is the staff?’

Perhaps, but it was only a guess, the leaders were still occupied with the formalities arising from the colonel’s suicide. A peasant with a wandering look in his eyes came up to our group.

‘The priest! The priest!’ he called out.

He explained that he had seen the town priest firing on us with a pistol from his window. Three of my comrades dashed off:

‘Where is the priest’s house?’

The peasant, very pleased with himself, led the way. But I noticed that the poor man looked rather cretinous. Perhaps the weakling was the fool usually present in every town. I went after them and overtook my companions.

‘You saw it yourself,’ I asked the peasant.

He nodded, very confidently.

‘How far off were you?’

‘Just at the place, under the window.’

‘Did you see the weapon?’

The man held his open hand in front of his face:

‘As well as I can see this hand.’

‘And what was it? A pistol or a revolver?’

The peasant, in the most assured way, told us that it was a two-barrelled pistol. A holster pistol of the eighteenth century, the kind of weapon he knew from having seen one in the garrets of some village. The comrades understood. But all the same they went to search the priest’s house. So many priests had fired on them, they said, that none of them was to be trusted. They searched the house without finding anything. The priest’s mother fainted. The ‘niece’, the classical priest’s housekeeper, kept screaming and calling on the priest by his pet name. The Red Cross took the mother on a stretcher to



Evacuation Scenes

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the hospital, and the priest and his woman were led to the place from which the civil population was being evacuated. As my comrades who accompanied them were armed, the priest thought that he was going to be shot. They tried to calm him, but he and his housekeeper were so excited that they heard nothing but the voices of their own fears. Behind the stretcher on which the orderlies were carrying the mother, the priest, fat, short, with huge hips and short legs, his hands crossed on his breast, unshaven, his eyes starting and reddened, perhaps from a sleepless night, kept crying out 'Jesus, in Thee I die', and tried to imitate the expression of martyred colonial missionaries, as he had seen them in prints. As he was in no danger of death, for no one thought of shooting him, it was even more grotesque. The housekeeper, wailing beside him, pierced the air with her screams, and, clinging to his arm, cried out:

'Now we won't see each other again until the next world.'

The priest was almost a monster of commonness, and as I watched the 'niece' I was moved once more by the capacity of women for love and pity. For she was rather nice. He was scarcely human. Kicking the skirts of his soutane with his heavy shoes at each step, he kept chanting 'Jesus, in Thee I die'. We were all rather ashamed of him. One of his conductors shrugged his shoulders and smiled, as if in reply to the enquiring glance of others:

'He'll get what is coming to him.'

The mother recovered her senses in the hospital. The three were sent to Madrid in one of the motor-coaches employed in evacuation. I suppose that the priest now believes more than ever in miracles. I remember that at each of his chants, the stork which was on guard at an angle of the little church tower turned its neck indolently and gazed at him with an exquisite daintiness.

Soon after the priest went off, we heard the first gun-fire. I thought:

'Now we are for it. They have got our exact range and are going to roast us alive.'

A 15.5 shell came booming over us. The roof of a house

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near by leapt in fragments into the air. They were firing at us from the other side of the sierra, at a high elevation, but they had also lighter pieces on our side of the mountain. Now one shell after another came. Some of the guns were firing at the place where the roads met, and others were seeking the artillery lorries and the massed militia. They fell all about us in sets of three or four. We estimated that it would take less than an hour to wreck the town. Everything fell into the greatest confusion. I would have liked to find those who were responsible, the military leaders of our column, as they were our greatest enemies, but we had enough to do in trying to dodge the cloudburst of shells. Fleeing from one we came under another. They were firing both shells and shrapnel. The latter burst in the air, scattering a cloud of burning fragments. In a few minutes the streets were empty. Everyone went where he could. I followed my comrades, and the six of us went to the portico of the Town-house—the temporary staff headquarters. It was an ancient two-storied building with a stone colonnade supporting the upper story. As the entrance hall and the staircase were filled with civil guards and assault guards who had taken refuge in a body, we kept outside. Every time a shell came, we tried to evade it by pressing closer to the stone pillars. Down below, in a row against the building, were eleven or twelve cars belonging to the staff. All had been pierced by bullets and fragments of shell. A civil guard kept muttering:

‘A nice kind of refuge. Not one of us will get out alive!’

We had all made the same comment to ourselves but none of us had uttered it aloud. We kept silent, intent on the firing of the enemy. Every time that a shell or a set of shells came, the crowd of civil and assault guards, of whom there were more than the entrance hall could hold, bulged outside, pressing into an incredibly small space. Always two or three of them were squeezed out and were exposed in the porch. We preferred to stay outside, behind the pillars. The danger seemed greater, but in fact was not so. For more than half an hour the hostile artillery poured its fire on the small square and the Town-house. The three guards who had remained exposed in the crush of men, fell when a shrapnel-shell ex-

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ploded actually under the cornice. Two were killed. Another, seriously wounded, died in hospital.

From time to time my companions and I stared at each other. We consoled each other with gestures of comic dismay. Four of us carried off the wounded man, under the shells. When we met the orderlies at the corner, we handed him over. We had to stay for a few minutes huddled under a projecting window; then, not knowing what to do, we went back to the Town-house so that we might all be together. The two dead men had been laid at the side of the porch, turned towards the wall. One of them was the man who said that we had been caught in a death-trap. During the explosions of shrapnel we felt the truth of what had been taught us at school about the atmosphere, that it was a solid body. The shock made by the burning thermite against obstacles (the side of a roof, the angle of a door, in the centre of the square) gave us an idea of the density of air. The heavy vibrations were compressed and reached us. As we did not see the shell, it seemed as if the air itself, in whirls mysteriously compressed, assaulted us, suddenly bursting our arteries and shattering our skulls.

In the midst of the horror of the bombardment there was something so clean, exact and geometrical that our terror seemed not to be an affection of our minds, but a mathematical abstraction. The wounded air sometimes condensed into broken crystals of shining blue and grey. The dead guards lying under the porches of the Town-house reminded us that through the concussions of the air there came lumps of hot iron. They had fallen forwards. The rifle of one of them rebounded on the ground and came tumbling towards my feet. I remembered how angry I was in Morocco at these hops of falling rifles (a rifle very easily comes to pieces), and I recalled also, across that space of ten years, the dry blows of a rifle clattering on flagstones as much stronger impressions than that made by the dead guard lying in his blood. He could be seen to be dead, for he did not show any reaction when his face crashed against the ground.

Of the other two, one remained flat on his belly, and the other got on his knees and was still staggering forward. One

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of my friends hastily mopped the blood which had splattered on his leg. The terror of those who remained exposed after these three guards fell was such that they all ran out and disappeared. They were avoiding the terrible lot which was falling on them first.

The idea not merely of steady resistance but even of an attack, arose in the minds of the militia and some of the assault guards in the middle of overwhelming disorder and disorganization. These were enough to strike terror into the most valiant. We too had that fear, the fear of a complete chaos of which one was a part.

Immediately after a set of shells had burst, we went out and reached the main road which was alongside. A little higher up lay two lorries, one with its engine destroyed, the other blown to fragments. Other lorries, ranged alongside the houses, had their engines still running. Some militia brought the news that shells had fallen in the military hospital. More shells fell, and we took refuge in a doorway. Once we were inside a comrade proposed:

‘Let us go! Let us go!’

‘Go where?’

We could not remain shut in, hardly protected, awaiting death passively. We all felt that, but had taken no notice of it until someone said it.

‘Wait a minute. Perhaps I can find someone.’

I went out. I actually came on a regular captain in his spotless uniform, master of his nerves. Amidst the explosions, he had the air of a father of a family, very impressive.

‘Have you seen the lieutenant-colonel?’ he asked me.

‘No.’

Another shell blew off the roof of the house opposite. Bits of wood and tiles fell at our feet. The captain smiled:

‘Their idea is to throw us out of this place,’ he said in complete serenity.

He had a bugle in his hand. He gave it to me and asked me to keep it. I took it and stared at it, clean, shining, spotless. Holding it, I asked him:

‘What are we to do?’

‘We must wait, wait. Do not be so impatient.’

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He wished to give the impression that he had a plan, but it was clear enough that he had not one. The captain was seeking for the chief just as we were seeking the captain. He disappeared lower down. I went into the telephone station on the threshold of which I had met the captain. Two telephone girls on the other side of the counter met me with looks of terror and supplication. They were quite young.

‘Get us relieved! Beg them to relieve us!’

I promised to do that at once, and in the meantime asked them to take care of the bugle. I gave it them and as I went out I saw that someone was talking to Madrid in a little cabinet with the door open. I stood listening. The conversation was with a member of the executive of the socialist party. He was being told what was happening and being asked for orders and reinforcements. The speaker was insignificant physically, small and thin, about fifty years old. He told me that he was president of the Casa de Pueblo¹ of Guadarrama, and as no one was doing anything, he was approaching the responsible heads of his party.

‘You are doing exactly what the military leaders are not doing.’

‘Quite true. But I think everyone must do what he can. Otherwise we are lost.’

I was quite ready to ask for orders, and in a way I did ask for them from that man, half a peasant, half an artizan, with a grey cap on his head, and a worn shirt.

‘What do you think we can do?’

‘Everyone must do what he can,’ he replied. ‘It is a matter of guts, of virility. Let those who have the guts go up the mountain.’

In the absence of organization, of officers, of a general staff, there was nothing for it but individual enterprise. I went back to find my comrades. I didn’t see them. They called to me from a lorry. I climbed on to it and told them what had happened. The shells were still falling. One of my comrades shouted out:

‘Come along, comrades! We are going for them!’

¹Casa de Pueblo. Socialist and proletarian headquarters in Spanish towns.

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Some militiamen left their refuges and came running to us. They climbed into the lorry in front and on getting in called to the others:

‘Let us go up, comrades! We’ll get rid of these cannons with our hands!’

Without knowing whence he had come, I saw an old friend in the middle of the street, a journalist. He recognized me. He wished to climb into the lorry and was just turning round when a string of shells arrived, like partridges. The smoke of the explosions enveloped us. When we had pulled ourselves together, we saw Comrade Fernandez Alvar flat in a pool of blood with half his skull blown off.

The engine was started and we began to climb up towards Alto de Leon. At once our spirits rose. It is one thing to fly from danger, another to endure it passively and yet another to go to meet it. I remember that as a child I was sometimes terrified of dark rooms. If I ran out of a dark bedroom, my fears increased so much and even might become so great that I began to cry out and to weep. But I found out one day that if I stopped running and turned to face the dark, my fright vanished. And so it was with me in the war.

As our lorry moved, other comrades jumped on it, clinging to the sides or to the running boards. We were going to the cannon’s mouth, towards the green heights which might conceal any kind of fauna, to the centre of the storm. Each of us had his rifle and his heart.

‘Let us get at them, comrades!’

The shells kept falling, but even under them volunteers kept joining us. ‘Up, boys!’

We had to stop in the shelter of the last houses, to persuade seven or eight of the comrades to get down, as they were heaped up, swarming all over the lorry even on the top of the motor. Whilst they were disputing I stared at Alvar’s body lying in the road, absorbed for a moment in recollections. He had been an anarchist and an active fighter for long. His tragedy was that he had never been able to inspire the organizations with complete confidence in him. He lived a strange life. Extraordinary things had always happened to him and he was so intelligent, wise and acute, and nearly

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always he made too much of his life and put into his adventures such real and natural simplicity that hardly anyone believed him to be sincere. That was his tragedy with the organizations. Latterly he was drawing close to communism, in which without doubt he might have come to be an important factor, but he was so wounded by everyone's distrust of him that his character was warped by a constant suspicion of bad faith in others, and it was possible that his deformation might have gone farther.

I recalled episodes in his career which had gained some notoriety. Latterly he had been expelled from the press enclosure at the League of Nations in Geneva, because during the debates on Abyssinia he had called the Italian delegate a swindler and Mussolini an assassin. In Berlin in 1933 he struck the head waiter of an hotel at which Goebbels had invited the foreign press to dinner, because the Spanish royal flag had been put at his place instead of the republican one. In fact his life had been filled with picturesque episodes in some of which he had simply lost his head, and from others of which he had emerged more anxious than ever to quarrel. Many a time I had abused Fernandez Alvar, seeking some duplicity in him, for I too suspected him, and often he had said to me:

'You are the only man whom I would allow to say these things to me.' Or

'In the office of the *Heraldo de Madrid* last night I struck an Italian anti-fascist captain for saying the same kind of thing to me.'

He was always angry with me, but all the same he was always coming to see me, because he guessed that I was one of the few people who understood him.

The disputes came to an end, and just before we got out of Guadarrama, in front of the little plateau on which the road-menders' hut stood, I looked at the body lying in the middle of the road, for the last time.

'Did you know him?' I asked my comrades.

'Whom?'

'Fernandez Alvar.'

He lay with his face turned towards us. His arms were

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open, a gesture very characteristic of him, and he seemed to be saying to us:

'Do you believe in me now? What more do you require of me?'

One of my companions said:

'Was it he who signed "Wilkins"?'

'Yes.'

Another said something which I could not hear because of the noise of the engine and of the bursting shells. I asked him:

'What did you say?'

He repeated, speaking more loudly:

'A bad egg!'

He said it, not disrespectfully, but with the usual tinge of distrust.

We might have gone on talking about him but we had just doubled the last house and as we were exposed completely to the enemy it was impossible to talk. The words were frozen in our throats.

CHAPTER V

BLACK AND RED WAR

The lorry in front of ours was overturned by a shell. Its occupants fell in a heap. Through the noise of the bombardment I remember to have heard laughter which was coming from those who had fallen. That wasn't only a proof of bravery or of serenity, it had a negative side. Although perhaps the laughter showed a healthy sporting feeling about the war, it might also reveal some incapacity to weigh each situation seriously and give it its true value. Our lorry had to stop, and the enemy took advantage of the opportunity to take better aim. The shrapnel came booming to us and exploded in the ditches along the road. Leaves of the poplars, cut off by the pieces of metal, rained down on us, and each shell sought us vainly but with a sinister persistence. We heard all round us the gusts from machine-guns, and got down hastily and scattered in disorder. Fifty yards or so in front were the comrades from the overturned lorry who had not yet quite got over their mirth. But through the laughter, one could feel the breath of death.

'Up!'

The enemy was stationed on the heights in hidden trenches and nests, and presently their fire came on us from in front and from the flanks.

'Let us get at them!'

The fascist batteries were directing their 15.5 shells behind us, on the entrance of the town, at the crossing of the roads, so as to cut us off. Other lorries came up the road, but when they had passed the roadmenders' hut they could go no further,

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because rifle shots were shattering the windcreens. The men got out and followed us in open waves. Blue monos with distinct badges; rifles with red bands on the barrel; rifles without a strap, carried on a hempen cord; young faces, adult faces, workers of the U.G.T. and C.N.T.

But it was impossible to advance a single step. You advanced quite exposed, dominated by the enemy positions as would happen to persons passing along a narrow street under fire from third-floor balconies. And still we did advance. No one mounted any longer by the white ribbon of the road passing through the green sea of pine and oak. The fury of the shells swept it. On the white asphalt, the friendly familiar asphalt of the city, young bodies were plastered—how a dead body clings to the ground!—among the wheels and twisted skeletons of motor-cars. The klaxon of one of them kept sounding until its battery was exhausted.

In the middle of the morning we came on two dead enemies, showing that we had reached the fascist lines. We ourselves could not have killed them, as we had fired hardly a single shot—but much lower down, just outside the town, we had four machine-guns which were firing unceasingly. The lieutenant could not have been a traitor. Or, it might be that the sergeants, our comrades the sergeants, had suppressed him and knew their job. We tried to go higher up, but two of us fell and the rest of us threw ourselves on the ground. We did not see the enemy. We did not know where he was, because the firing attacked us from all sides. Our guns were silent. We would have to go on without getting down from the lorries, expecting at any moment the enemy shell which would blow them to pieces. And the command? Where was the command? Why were we there without leaders? Why had the general staff not told us what they knew, given us the advantage of the technical knowledge by which the defence would have been easier and less bloody? Perhaps military technical knowledge is not granted to rank and file when these are not mechanized soldiers, soldiers of the regiments, but only masons or peasants? But after all it was war, and it ought to have had some kind of professional interest for a professional. Perhaps in these first days they all held back, ex-

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pecting that events of themselves would take a definite direction, so that its accomplished fact would have to be accepted in favour of the conquerors? But in that case the accomplished fact could only be the victory of Franco. In the enemy camp not a soldier moved except under the direct orders of his officers. All that we had to oppose to that discipline were the enthusiasm and the free initiative of the working mason, the business clerk, the labourer and the out-of-work journeyman, a rifle and a cartridge-pouch not too full. No one thought of going to the front provided with a tin of food and flagon of water. A man was a rifle and forty cartridges. Yes, but also his heart, which carried a load of generosity larger than the charge of trinitrotoluene in a shell. We looked round again.

‘What are we doing now? Are we advancing? Are we to stay here burrowing in the ground like moles to make a line of defence? Who can tell us if this line is the best? We are the people. Day by day we have to find in our own zeal all the necessities of life, of comfort, of happiness. Is that to be thought nothing? Does nothing tell you that we are the people, all the people? Are you still going to disdain us?’

What gratitude, respect and cordial intimacy the few professional soldiers who are with us receive! How we follow their advice! But even these feel the need of orders. Where is the command? There are no orders except those breathed by the droning of the shells which come over us, which pass over our heads like flocks of strange invisible birds. But still it is better here than under the pillars of the Town-house. Now at least we have come to face the phantom instead of running from it or shutting our eyes to it.

I looked at my companions' faces. They still wore expressions of the vanguard, gestures of courage and of pressing forward, of the offensive. But we could not advance. Half an hour under fire almost without being able to fire ourselves. (Fire against whom? against what?) The stems of the pines, wounded by bullets, gave out an odour of balsam. We were holding out. To climb uphill without having slept, almost without having eaten, under the sun, under the shells, was to have climbed far. Our hearts were in our mouths. Our will ascended farther, but our feet were of lead. Lorries began to

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appear on the road again. A company of assault guards got out of them in the shelter of the roadmenders' hut, hidden between the poplars in a curve. They deployed on the two sides of the road, alarmed, running. To attack a mountain full of invisible machine-guns and cannon, armed only with rifles was a feat. Perhaps a folly, but one of the sublime follies. Towards noon our aeroplanes arrived, seeking the guns on the crest; they must have found them on the other slope of the sierra where they dropped their bombs. The grey smoke of the explosions rose from behind the ridge.

Looking at the faces of my comrades I saw that two of them were dead, although they were still upright and advancing. In war there are many dead men who still keep on their feet, advancing, retreating, firing. The face is losing its expression, the glance its vivacity, for that is the first to die. Through the dead eyes we see the desolation within. Psychologists of war tell us that in modern war the living are not killed as in the ancient wars, but those who are killed are already dead. Two of my comrades were dead already. Perhaps I was dead too. My comrades, soldiers of the people's liberty, how many times have we died? How many times come again to life? The worst is that although we come to life again, it is long until we know it, long before we recognize ourselves again. We can try to help ourselves over it. Shouting out our name, for example, in the hills, and studying our own voice in the echoes; but sometimes the voice comes back to us poisoned, the echo sounding as if the world were empty, and we do not recognize it as our own voice. Or, what is worse, we do recognize it and it really kills us. My comrades, soldiers of the people, die and be born again! Let us die and come back to life six times every day and every night.

If you two, you six, think that you have died, let us shout your name to see what the echo replies:

'Ricardo! Antonio! Joaquin! Vicente!'

The echo recalls mornings of sunlight and of mortar on scaffolding. Gay memories of labour and of love, of danger and of death, with no more interest than the tales of children. There was no other plot than that of empty days rebelling against monotony, a common theme. But as in children's stories

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there were words simple and universal, words of mother and wife, also steeped in mortar and the sunlight on scaffolding. And these words spoke of a minimum right to a minimum of liberty. Liberty to breathe a dream and be faithful to it, foreseeing the path along which one day would have to walk sons bearing the same name and with their clothes coloured by the same stain of work.

The forge and the strength of the forge, with an iron thirst, a thirst for the days to come and for the conquest of a future to be won simply and sensibly by the blows of the hammer amidst confident smiles and confiding glances, the smiles and glances of goodwill.

The old peasants, hoping. Hungry childhood, imagination unable to get beyond misgivings, unable to feel that they have a right to the sunbeams and the rains which burn or drench them, but which fall for the benefit of others.

The vague anxiety of feeling that they hardly own the impulse to grasp the sickle, and that when that impulse reaches the steel blade, it already belongs to another. And yet the world was beautiful. Don't you recognize yourselves as living in that?

But behind us we heard now and again a pistol shot. We turned round in surprise and saw no one. I discovered at length that the enemy were firing dum-dum bullets at us, which exploded as they struck the trees. My friends continued to think them pistols, and the one beside me was indignant:

'We aren't even using our rifles, and those behind us are firing pistols!'

He thought that they were firing stupidly, to dull their own fears.

The assault guards were climbing on our left. They had got ahead of us. They left the road strewn with blue uniforms but still they climbed. Even to-day I cannot explain to myself how they could have reached Alto de Leon, maintained their position there for more than two hours, and then retired, resisting, down to our level. The firing was concentrated on them and left us in peace for more than half an hour.

When we saw them coming back, about the middle of the afternoon, we also began to retreat little by little. Without artillery preparation it was useless to keep advancing. We had

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seen not a single enemy. Our two wounded lay groaning behind us, pouring out their blood, no one being able to pick them up. Another one of us fell head first, as if he had tripped, but did not get up again. We took his rifle and continued to drag ourselves downwards. Sad, I thought, what had happened to that comrade. He died alive, and completely. We passed the two dead fascists again. They were already bloodless, the faces and hands yellow like ripe lemons, the skin of the forehead like leather. They had no weapons. Their companions must have taken them before they abandoned them.

We continued to descend. We were thirsty. We did not feel hunger, which had turned into the fever of convalescence. The two fascists could not be feeling it either. I saw that our comrades with their expressionless eyes were sorrowing for these individuals who quite surely had been firing on us a few hours before. In its way it was a comradeship of the dead.

When we reached a piece of level ground by which we could pass to the high road over an unexposed spot, helping along our wounded as best we could, two girls in militia uniform arrived. They were clad in monos, had their rifles on their shoulders, and were carrying with difficulty a great zinc jar of water. They made us see that one of the comrades we were carrying on our shoulders was already dead. They produced for us two tins of sardines and gave first aid to the other wounded man.

One of my comrades swore that the oil from sardines he had eaten in Madrid two days before had come out from his nose and anus, and refused the tin, but he drank plenty of water. When they saw we were about to continue descending, the girls implored us:

'Don't go away, comrades. Don't go down to the town. We'll bring you what you need.'

They insisted a little later:

'We'll carry the wounded man to the road and we'll lie down in a ditch and wait till a lorry passes.'

The companion with whom the sardines hadn't agreed declared:

'This front is no better than a bawdy house. There is no leadership and no orders.'

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'Don't go away from here,' the girls implored us again. 'Thanks to you and the assault guards the scoundrels have been kept back until now.'

Gusts from machine-guns came over our heads again. We sheltered a little longer behind a hillock. One of the girls, dark, very lively, turned gracefully towards the firing and called out in her delicate and childish voice:

'The b —— rs.'

Even the wounded man laughed. We told the girls that we were short of cartridges and they hurriedly promised to come up with a case of three thousand. They would also bring up some food for the man who refused the sardines. They urged us:

'At least stay here until night. An inspector has come from the War Office and they are going to change the officers and send artillery.'

I could not forget the 7.5 guns abandoned on the middle of the road because of the shells of the enemy.

'They are going to save them,' the dark girl told us, and added:

'They have caught a man at sabotage and have shot him. The sergeants and an extra man, a communist, have taken over the batteries.'

Perhaps all that was untrue and said only to strengthen our morale. I asked her:

'To what party do you belong?'

'Communist. And she', pointing to her companion, 'to the United Youth.'

They both were wearing blue monos and had their hair tied back with a red ribbon. They emptied the jar of water over our hands and feet, and supporting the wounded man, they moved off slowly towards the high road. The girl on the right handed the jar to the one on the left, who was more sheltered from the bullets:

'We mustn't go back', she said laughing, 'with a sieve instead of a jar.'

Their twenty years old heads held high, they defied the bullets. Watching the girls as they moved off, the eye of my friend came to life. He said:

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'We must go back. With women like that is there anyone who can beat us?'

An awakened instinct—the girls were pretty—quickened his dying humanity. Everything was in that. Until an idea becomes flesh, it cannot unite with an instinct; it does not live. How can the fascists make the masses kindle to their ideology?

And yet the case of the fighting fascists can be understood. Hallucinated beings, with many repressed desires, a monstrous store of desires, for robbery, power, riches and social prestige. But what of the masses? They can offer them nothing, not one of their instincts can they reach.

My comrade saw the girl moving away. In his eyes one could divine thoughts of a smiling simplicity:

'How simple is war! What grace in heroism! How easy is death and how stupid!'

One hardly thinks in war, and in any case thinking is not by the understanding but by the eyes. And so because reason was hardly at work, we were all afraid and would not have confessed it. Our fear came on us when we began to descend, turning our backs to the enemy. It was an animal fear, and so on a lower level, in the dim subconsciousness, a fear that we would not have admitted aloud. Rather would we have gone to death. All behind the place where we were, the ground belonged to the phantoms we had left behind. We stayed there more than an hour. The voice of our young girl comrade still echoed in our ears: 'Hold out until the night.' We stayed an hour there. When darkness came we retraced our steps upwards and stayed two days and two nights a little way higher up than the two dead fascists. Three times they brought us food and munitions, but all the time we saw no other enemies than the two corpses, now decomposing. That deepened our fear, which was intermittent. True, our fear was not shameful, and did not urge us to fly. It was a fear of the lemon-yellow which the dead faces and hands offered us at every moment. Death appeared in no metaphysical image, but palpable, evil-smelling, sickening. We saw none of the enemy, but at every moment felt the breath of his burning lead. When the fire of machine-guns and mortars allowed it, we pushed out our heads and surveyed, anxiously, but in vain, a distance of

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two or three hundred yards. In the middle of the afternoon of the second day we saw large groups shifting their position among the pines. We fired at them and they answered us with shrapnel, which stripped the pines around us. But it was impossible to tell from where the firing came.

Hours later we heard our own guns for the first time. They were directed against the heavy guns of the enemy. Shortly afterwards the 7.5 guns also opened fire (they must have been those about which I had been so much disturbed). They were trying to find their range. Clearly there was still the same disorder in the town as in the forest. I could do no more. I felt that if I stood up I must collapse. We agreed that I should go down to the town at dusk. I would come back with instructions, if any were given me, and with information about the general position of the front, if the staff had it and was willing to give it us.

Between our position and the first houses I saw more than fifteen abandoned human bodies—one of them was the girl of United Youth. I saw all that with an indifference so great that it surprised even me, and I kept on my way down. The bullets of the enemy passed high above with a short sharp hiss. Leaves cut from a poplar fell softly.

The town was quite changed. Trees severed by shells. Houses wrecked. I went towards the sanatorium where I expected to find the staff. The director was still on duty. He had been deserted by the nurses, many of whom sympathized with the enemy, some going under pretext of illness, others through fear. The orderlies were still there and were helping the director to take care of the children. The doctor retained his serene and tranquil appearance, but there was a shade of anxiety in his eyes. He had acquired the 'front-line look'. One of the wards had been struck by a shell.

'We shall evacuate the children to-morrow,' he told me.

It must have been very depressing to feel that gun-fire was soon to destroy the results of so much care, so many hygienic plans, so much scientific zeal. I asked if there had been any deaths in the sanatorium, and he answered:

'A doctor, a nurse and a patient killed.' The patient was not a child but an adult. They had been in the theatre in the

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middle of an operation on the chest when a shell came in by the window and exploded. It blew up the roof of the theatre, which was also the floor of one of the children's dormitories, fortunately empty at the time.

The sanatorium had lost its odour of ozone and clean wood.

When I went out I turned aside to go into the theatre. The operating table was a tangle of nickel and glass. Glass shelves shattered. Bottles, forceps, surgical instruments on the floor. The partition separating the theatre from the X-ray room had been blown in, and the apparatus lay in fragments on the floor. White chairs splintered. Another partition destroyed. The roof bulged as if it were made of rubber, and there were great rents in it. The walls were riddled with metal fragments. As I was going out, I saw a narrow and very long package thrown on the floor amongst the wreckage. It was wrapped in coarse white cloth. Not knowing what it could be, I kicked it with my foot. It sounded like dry tow. I recognized that it was a man wrapped up. A corpse. The bundle had been carefully packed. In the catastrophe of the theatre, amid the broken autoclave and the hand basins with their polished taps for hot and cold water, it must have been a very hygienic corpse. I noticed the sharpness of the narrow shoulders, the incredible length, the stiffness. My last backward glance was from the threshold. I went out, sought the director once more, who told me where the staff was.

'But is there a general staff?' I asked ingenuously.

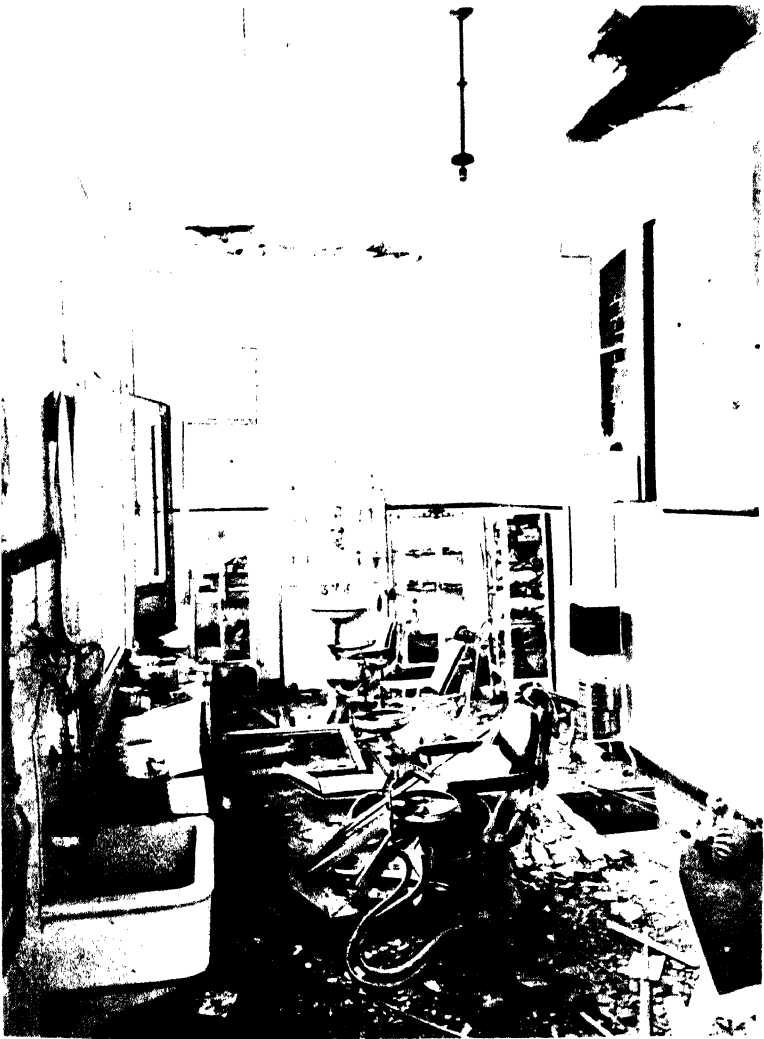
He smiled bitterly:

'I know', he said, 'that you are up above there, and that everything is in chaos.'

Night had fallen. The artillery was silent and only the sound of rifles and machine-guns was heard. The streets were deserted. Rubbish everywhere. I had to lift my feet high to keep from tripping in the dark. I had lighted a cigarette. Bullets occasionally passed high overhead. A voice came out of the darkness:

'Look out with that cigarette, comrade!'

I concealed the cigarette in the hollow of my hand to avoid a dispute (although the glow could not be seen fifty yards



Madrid: Dental Clinic of San Carlos Hospital wrecked
by Enemy Aviation

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away) and went on. The chief was not in the hotel of the staff. He had 'gone down to Madrid'. Some workmen were installing a telephone exchange.

'Who is the chief?' I asked the officer. 'Is it Lieut.-Colonel N.?'

The officer, with regimental aloofness, told me that Lieut.-Colonel N. had been killed the day before, that General R. had been appointed in command at Guadarrama and had been in office for twenty-four hours.

'But now', he added, 'he is in Madrid.'

That being so, I took myself off to search for a house in which I could sleep. I found one at once, for all the houses had been abandoned and most of them had been opened, in some cases by forcing the locks. I entered one and found an undisturbed bedroom with a large double bed. The water taps and the electric light were out of action, as was to be expected. Kapok mattresses, clean and sweet. Clearly the private room of some bourgeois who had fled in a hurry.

Soon after I was in the room, a beautiful wolf-dog appeared; he saw me in the dark and came up to me suspiciously. He was growling, but not in a threatening way. I patted him and he licked my hand in humble confidence. And then I was sure that his growls were due to fear. Some explosions at a distance made him growl more strongly. The dog must have belonged to the owners of the house and had been left behind when they fled. I was undecided for a while. I didn't know whether or not to stay there. A shell fell within a hundred yards. The dog took refuge between my legs and growled again. That animal would die of fright if it stayed there.

When I made up my mind to go to bed another shell fell close to the house, actually inside the garden. The dog howled in desperation. I went out and took it with me. When the shell exploded the walls shook as if they were cardboard. I wished to sleep quietly even if I had to wait for accommodation. I walked down below the town. About three and a half miles from Guadarrama I came on another little town which, although also under the fire of the enemy, was a little way out of its track. There some comrades found me a bed and I slept in peace for two hours. I had passed three days and four

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nights without closing my eyes, but in spite of my fatigue I didn't deprive myself of half an hour's solitary meditation, which in many circumstances, and especially in these, was a delight. I don't remember what I thought, but now, as then, I hear the wind singing in the wounded pines, and in spite of the war it was still a country wind of peaceful days, the wind of Virgil's *Georgics*. Next day I learned of the expected arrival from Madrid of the first of the Companies of Steel, hurriedly organized by the Fifth Regiment, a formation of regular militia organized by the Communist Party. I decided to wait for it, as General R. had not yet returned to Guadarrama.

CHAPTER VI

BEHIND THE FRONT

When I left the house I saw comrades from headquarters and several groups of militia going towards the centre of the town. They were on their way to the burial of a comrade killed two days before, during the first bombardment of Guadarrama. He was a peasant of the neighbourhood and had joined the first forces which came from Madrid.

I also accompanied them and we all marched towards a narrow little street of one-story houses. Each had only the door with a small window on the left. The interior was hidden by a curtain of sacking over the doorway, and the thin little red curtain in front of the unglazed window shook in the wind. Each side of the street was filled with closely-packed peasants. Women in black, old men with their best jackets hanging from their shoulders, and shirts soiled with the sweat of labour, and curious, frightened children. Under the blue sky, between the white-washed walls, the silence was as solemn as country silence can be. Our attendance gratified the country folk. We brought the homage of fighters from other regions, perhaps even from Madrid, the great city, to their hero. Some of us entered the house. Two militia girls had gathered all the red flowers they could find in the gardens of the deserted villas and had brought them in luscious armfuls.

The dead man lay in a coffin of plain wood, neither painted nor lined, in the centre of a room that served as kitchen, dining-room and bedroom. Poverty, clean and honest, spoke in the sagging walls and the crippled chair. The floor was

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spotless. The old woman washed every tile on the floor five times a day and the tragedy of her life was to have only fourteen tiles to scrub. A despairing protest rose in our throats as we saw that self-respecting misery, which told us of age-long resignation. The parents, already old, were seated at the bedside, waiting in passive sorrow. From time to time the mother raised a snow-white handkerchief to her face. She wept silently, as she had wept on the distant day of her wedding, at the first baptism, at the wedding of her other son (who was there with his wife), and on that evening when they went to the army. Now, as she could do nothing else, she kept weeping.

Four of our militia carried the coffin into the street. The relatives followed, and stood in front of the door. All the peasants uncovered. Then came the local peasant militia, formed in groups of four, some thirty in all. Each of them carried his rifle on his shoulder, against his white shirt or corduroy jacket. They waited in formation until the procession started. Neither stiff nor theatrical, a quiet stateliness throbbed in the gentle gestures and restrained words. They had opened the coffin and covered the body with red flowers.

Before we marched, a comrade went towards the coffin, stood at attention, and said a few words:

‘A man of ours has fallen, a peasant, fighting against the fascists. I, who like nearly all the militia present here, am a worker in the city, wish to tell you that we must not weep for our brother, but run to fill the place he has left open in our ranks. Beside this body whose glory fills with pride the peasants of Collado, we, the city workers, invite you, our comrades of the country, to swear to us to go on fighting, all together, to the end, for our liberties.’

He went up to the father and mother of the dead man and embraced them. The procession set off without clamour, silently and simply. The picket of peasants which followed the body, proudly escorting their hero, carried their rifles on their shoulders with the same noble naturalness with which they carried their hoes. At each side of the coffin marched three pioneers, solemn, with red neckcloths and flowers in their hands. It was all of a beauty that overwhelmed us.

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The body was committed to the earth whilst some forty militia sang the funeral march. Untrained voices, rough from the workshop or the field of toil, hymned the brave strophes. When it was over the picket at the cemetery wall fired into the air. The echo rolled round the nearest mountains, carrying the last protest of our hearts. The mayor explained to me:

‘It is the first civil burial without priests that has taken place in this town.’

And so the volley, which I had thought excessive in this case, and which the peasants had fired on their own initiative, believing it an obligatory homage to their comrade, was opportune. It signalized the opening of a new era in rural life. For centuries the villagers had learned to have a superstitious belief in the supreme significance of death. All those who were there from the city, representatives of its boundless culture and power, had always spoken to them of the mystery of death. For the first time death had taken a secondary place, for all of us who had come from there and had placed ourselves by the side of the peasants spoke to them of the simple activity and creative joy of life.

As the volley in the cemetery must have rolled across the valleys and reached the hostile batteries, the fascist guns on the heights of Tablada thought fit to send us two large shells at random, without an objective. One burst in a farmyard and killed two fowls. The other fell between the church and the cemetery, but as the procession had already passed, no one was wounded. It was no shock in the life of the villagers, as for three days they had been lulled to sleep by the roll of the guns.

In the simple life of that village (five miles from the front) mourning for the dead peasant had passed from the new jackets of the relations of the hero to the dusty pots of geraniums which opened their pale red on window frames worn by rain and sun.

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I heard from some comrade that the 'Company of Steel' was not yet coming up to Guadarrama, and so the same afternoon I went to Madrid in the cabin of a service lorry. I arrived at dusk. I was full of curiosity. There must have been many changes since the rebels had been beaten in the capital. I had left my weapons in Collado and I went straight to the editorial office of *La Libertad*, a bourgeois radical daily paper with a long-standing republican tradition. I wrote until four in the morning, describing everything that I had seen in the last few days after leaving San Rafael, and it was dawn when I left. In the editorial office I found nothing but the optimism and confidence in triumph which there was then all through republican Spain. The politicians I met there—deputies of the Left Republican Party—agreed 'that provocation in the form taken by Franco's plot was needed to make possible the complete republican reform of all social institutions'. Although I could not judge the state of things well that night, and was back in Guadarrama at noon, I ascertained in the few hours that the proletarian parties remained faithful to the discipline of the Popular Front, whose Government was more firmly seated in power than before. I was especially interested to see if the blood shed by the workers in Madrid had reflected its glory on the Government, or had merely been another episode in class war. That was of great importance. It proved to me that unity of action within the Popular Front was absolute. It made me very optimistic because I had feared that in the course of the struggle the proletarian parties would assume an attitude towards the Government of armed and vigilant tolerance, and that this would certainly lead to dissension and internal conflict. There was nothing of that. Moreover, the city in superficial appearance was normal, the victory having been consolidated inside the capital. A picturesque incident gave me personal experience of details by which my rapid judgment of the situation in Madrid was completed.

When I left the offices of *La Libertad*, it was very late and neither the metropolitan railway nor the tramways were running. Nor were there any taxis, and as my house was on the other side of the city, I went up to a motor-car which I saw

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stopping in the street and which bore the initials C.N.T. At the side of the car was a group of militia.

'Do you belong to the C.N.T.?' I asked.

They said they did, and that they were on vigilance duty. When I found that they were patrolling the section of the city in which my house was situated, I asked them to take me there. I told them who I was. I had not with me my papers of identity, but only an old 'Socorro Rojo' card without a photograph. Nor had I troubled to ask the staff at Guadarrama for a safe-conduct or any other kind of document, being full of the confidence one has in the loyalty and camaraderie of everyone in moments of fighting. I found with surprise that the three anarchists knew 'Sender' well, and that they were all agreed that I was assuming his name. The result was amusing. I protested, but could not take the matter seriously. The anarchists not only did not take me to my house, but wished to carry me off to their local committee. It was four in the morning, and I would have preferred to go to bed for a few hours' sleep, but the matter became more complicated. When I saw that I was going to lose my night, I began to take things seriously. As I knew the simplicity of the reactions of these convinced anarchists, I raised my voice and reproached them bitterly for making me waste a few hours. As they still persisted in detaining me for 'assuming the personality of Sender', I got angry and heaped insults on them. That sort of imbecility, I told them, would make us lose the war. They looked surprised but were still determined to detain me. There was nothing for it but to let them take me. In the local committee we had a bad reception. Before I had said anything, someone spoke roughly to those who had arrested me, telling them that 'they had no business to bring arrested persons there, as it was not a police station'. Among other things, they wished to imply that if I had been caught in the act, I ought to have been dealt with on the spot. I hesitated between laughter and indignation, but I saw very well that between jests and facts the matter might take me to the cemetery; and so I raised my voice and used such angry language that one of them threw his revolver on the table and began to shout out that perhaps his weapon was going to kill a com-

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rade when there were still plenty of enemies in hiding! At last I convinced them, but it was five in the morning when they told me that they would not take me home in the car, but that I could go off if I wished. Once more I made them see that it was stupid to let me go, after having thought of shooting me, without the circumstances having changed in the least. But in case the discussion should become complicated again, I went off.

I went home on foot. Patrols stopped me, but it was sufficient to tell my name for them to let me pass; nothing more. Some even warned the next patrol so that they should not make difficulties for me. Madrid had a most strange appearance. All the windows and balconies were open, and all the bedrooms facing the street were lighted, although the streets themselves were in darkness. The largest buildings seemed to have a want of solidity, a lightness most startling. It seemed a city of transparent glass. Sometimes a sentinel would say:

‘Don’t go by O’Donell Street; it is rather dangerous. Go round by Alcalá.’

Revolver shots could be heard—snap-shots, one at a time. But that could not disturb anyone who had come from Guadarrama, and I walked rather at random, choosing the streets that seemed most fantastic. The corner of Alcalá and Principe de Vergara was simply splendid. Great houses of the wealthy with all their chandeliers ablaze behind the lines of glass curving round the corners. The order had been given that windows and balconies should remain lighted, to make it more difficult for hidden fascists to cause trouble. Every night one of them was caught with weapons in his hand. There were two modes of punishment. Sometimes they took away the weapons and threw the man into the street from the windows or the balcony. Sometimes they were taken to the nearest political organization, and when morning came the Red Cross was called by telephone to remove the bodies to somewhere outside the town. They took only doubtful cases to the Public Security Office, because these had to be tried before the ordinary tribunals.

I went through Madrid in so roundabout a way—guided by the odd lighting—that it was day when I reached my house. I didn’t go to bed. I called a friend on the telephone,

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but could not get her (and certainly it was an unusual hour), and I wrote and posted a letter. Then I kept an appointment with a commander who was going to Guadarrama and who was to take me there in his car. The commander was there at the appointed time, but told me that he could not start until noon. That being so, he lent me the car and I went to the Ministry of War, to the quarters of an organization of writers, and lastly to the barracks of the Fifth Regiment, where I enrolled in an expedition going up to Guadarrama.

In that short round, I was able to make new observations, although they were superficial. In the writer's organization I didn't find a single writer but I met various snobs, which was a pleasure, as I didn't know what would be their attitude in these moments when the real significance of things rose to the surface. I met some of these gentry also in the War Office. Many of them I didn't know by name, but I had seen them so often in so many places that they had passed into the category of persons known only by sight who come unexpectedly into one's life. They are to be met behind the scenes in theatres, although they are neither actors nor authors, in the meeting-places of authors, although they do not write, and in the haunts of painters, although they do not paint. As dilettanti everywhere, I expected to find them even in the trenches, although they would not fire, but in that respect their snobbism failed. They could not be taken as a joke, because sometimes they set the tone in places where there were persons of good judgment and talent. Their power lay in the frivolity and lightness by which they quickly formed an atmosphere. Amongst them pretentious poets abounded, and there was nearly always a sexual pervert who would give an evil charm to the whole nasty crowd. Nor was there missing the female type with the solid face, without the inner light which, to my mind, is the secret of feminine interest, conscientiously ugly, but with a sexual personality expressed in muttered whispers, sometimes with a suggestion of abnormalities. But in spite of that, cases of amorous passion sometimes were to be found in these circles, men so feminine and women so virile that the double inversion corrected itself, as sometimes happens in the physical world.

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They received me with curiosity, and when I told them that I came from Guadarrama and gave them my impression of the situation on that front, they corrected me with other interpretations. They gesticulated with an air of being in all the secrets, of having accepted all the facts; they were capable of patronizing tempests and earthquakes, and of correcting the paths of cyclones (quite a pleasing attitude in its way), and set themselves to tell me what was really happening in Guadarrama. I listened to them at first with real curiosity, but they told me such lies and follies that for a moment I thought that I had come on a set of madmen and hysterics (the kind of hysteric with the mania of knowing better than anyone else, the mania which most easily becomes overmastering). They told me how the colonel who committed suicide died, and what the aeroplane was doing when it flew over us. I contradicted them, and as we did not agree, suggested that they should come up to Guadarrama with me to settle who was right. Some of them grew pale and began to speak about other fronts. Others became angry, considering my suggestion to be offensive, although they did not say so to me.

They changed their tactics. They spoke about Toledo, Córdoba and Huesca. I listened to them with the same indignant irony with which I had listened to the anarchists the night before. One of them called me aside and, talking to me mysteriously, said:

‘Don’t you know? They have succeeded in closing pincers on Talavera.’

‘Who?’

‘Varela. It seems to be all up with us.’

But when I asked them to explain what the pincers were, they fell into confusion, and those who listen to that sort of talk in good faith became pale, and since the beginning of the war have done nothing but pass from sorrow to dread. There are two kinds of snobs; those of theory and those of action. Those of whom I have been speaking were the theorists. Those of action had a much stronger personality, although it differed little amongst them. They recalled the clowns in a Spanish circus who amuse the people in the intervals. They help in taking down the trapezes, in changing the carpets, and fixing

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railings. They rush about rapidly, put down something to pick up another, fumble with the ropes and so forth. They move about on the arena more than anyone else, and what they do is useless or hindering, but is amusing. When they found that I had been mobilized, they assumed a slightly insolent attitude. I was not surprised, as I knew that the mere presence of one of the militia humbled them. But I had not gone there to see them, but in the hope of meeting a sweet friend who also might have come in quest of news about me. She arrived as I was going out. She got into the car with me and accompanied me to the barracks of the Fifth Regiment. She was indignant, but also very pleased:

‘They told me that you were on the sierra with a rifle.’

Her intonation was in itself a commentary. She wished to say:

‘You are a queer creature! What possessed you to go up there?’

But there was also a flavour of admiration in her words. I felt then a satisfaction to my manly vanity. The same kind of feeling must have been felt by Carthaginian soldiers as they marched past under propitious auguries and the gaze of women. A wholly barbarous feeling.

We reached Cuatro Caminos. That working-man’s suburb had its usual appearance. The streets were full of workmen coming and going. Women and old people lived in the glory of the war among the militia, who did their usual work in the intervals of fighting. A few armed groups mounted or left the tramcars. The conductor and the other passengers greeted them with friendly words, always wishing them the best of luck. My emotions were awakened by something that my friend did not notice. That suburb, which was a city in itself, had been the scene of most bloody repression. The politics of the Puerta del Sol had many times drenched with blood the streets of Tetuan de las Victorias and of Cuatro Caminos. The governments of Gil Robles and the democratic governments had acted alike in that. And now when the workers of Cuatro Caminos were armed, they gave a lesson in political sense to the Puerta del Sol, forgetting all resentment, acclaiming the Government of the Popular Front unconditionally,

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and going to stake their lives on the anti-fascist fronts. In the fustian and the sweaty shirts and broken shoes of Cuatro Caminos, I saw something more than I had ever seen, a new element, now of capital importance: political capacity.

My friend came with me to the gate of the barracks. When she knew that I was going back to the front, she whispered to me. I shook my head. She spoke again and again and I repeated my 'No'. Then she asked me, perhaps in a spirit of revenge:

'What would you say if I were to fall in love?'

'You! With whom? Surely not with one of these?' I meant the snobs. She burst into laughter.

I saw that there was something behind the threat, and I told her that to fall in love would be all right if it were really love. She was married, but knew nothing of love, and said that she wasn't yet certain if she were in love or not. Some other day we could talk it over at length. As I got out to enter the barracks, she gave the driver the address of a hospital where she was working. 'Oh!' I said to myself, 'she must be in love with a doctor.' That business of love and its chances interested me as if it were a game of five-year-old children. She was a very pretty girl and most intelligent. There had been no raptures in our affection; it was sweet and yet intelligent. Such friendship without passion was a moral luxury which I carried with a kind of insolent modesty. As I alighted at the entrance of the barracks I forgot all these things, and meeting with the militia brought back the tension of Guadarrama.

CHAPTER VII

FIRST COMPANY OF STEEL

The barracks of the Fifth Regiment had been an ecclesiastical building and there were posters on the walls of the former recreation-ground. Sets of militia were marching and counter-marching at drill. I stopped to read a large placard which gave particulars of the Companies of Steel now being organized.

Large type at the top said: 'To join the Companies of Steel the following are necessary'; and then in smaller red type,

1. To be physically fit and provided with a medical certificate.
2. To be guaranteed by an anti-fascist organization or by a group of anti-fascist friends.
3. To have some military training and to be ready to complete it rapidly.
4. To undertake to obey rigid military discipline.

The Company of Steel, it went on, 'is a "shock" company. Its action is nearly always offensive, attacking. Its capacity for rapid mobility must be developed to the most extreme point. Penetration of the lines of the enemy, surprise, hand-to-hand fighting, are its regular work.

'The Company of Steel is composed of the flower of the militia, of self-sacrificing men, enthusiasts, brave, ever ready to die for the liberties of the people.'

'To die for some purpose,' I said to myself when I had read the placard, 'that was all that was needed in these days at

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Guadarrama. Not to die stupidly as the colonel died. And as others had died.'

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I went off in a service convoy, and a little above Villalba was overtaken by lorries in which the first Company of Steel was going up. A hoarse and steady clamour announced them:

'Ra! ra! ra!'

I recognized Marquez, their captain.

'Ra! ra! ra!'

One hundred and fifty men, most of them metal-workers and many of them communists, and not all Spaniards—remember Guido Paolo—alike in youthful and compelling vigour, infecting everyone with their spirit.

'Ra! ra! ra! The Company of Steel will pass!'

Spontaneously, since they had left Madrid, they had agreed on their battle-cry, 'Ra! ra! ra!' harsh and abrupt. The first Company of Steel went up to Guadarrama on a fresh July morning. It seemed that the road itself ran on in front of the lorries towards the bridge, towards the post which still bore the name of the Civil Guard, towards the town itself. Above the town the crests of Alto de Leon. Above them the light grey smoke of the burning pines. It was their first approach to the front. The war was coming close to them, and was entering their blood with the cool morning air. Blue monos, rifles on the shoulder, hand-bombs at the waist.

'Ra! ra! ra!'

Captain Marquez, sitting alongside the driver in the first lorry, judged that they were coming within the zone of fire of the fascist artillery. There was a bridge on which the enemy would concentrate their fire. Marquez told me that the staff had been reorganized, and that he had a great belief in the new chief of the General Staff and his officers. His faith at once infected me. We were all longing for a technical support on which we could rely. Marquez looked at the nearest peaks each time more ambitiously. 'They have strong positions.' But the militia behind him shouted out their war-cry, and Marquez smiled. If the enemy did occupy strong positions, it

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offered us one advantage—the possibility of capturing them and making them ours.

We reached the bridge. A shell fell at the side of the road and raised a yellow mushroom of soil and smoke. The crack of the explosion was harsh and metallic. Everyone in the second lorry was silent. Then a voice called out comically:

‘Martinez, it must have been you they spotted!’

The driver of the first lorry turned the petrol low. The captain thought automatically, but watching, that the humming of the motors must be keeping them from hearing the arrival of shells and of dodging them. But to get out would be stupid. He ordered the driver:

‘A little faster, comrade!’

The four lorries crossed the bridge at full speed.

‘There it comes, pioneer!’

They called the oldest of them ‘pioneer’. Another shell. Another behind it. A sergeant of the second section shook his shoulder, which was covered with dust, and murmured as he looked angrily at the mountain, now much nearer. The drivers, pressing on the accelerators, gripped the wheels more firmly, and blinked at each explosion. As the lorries were uncovered, smoke and grit made their eyes smart. But they had passed through the first zone of gun-fire unharmed. The war-cry sounded again:

‘Ra! ra! ra! The Company of Steel will pass!’

Everyone wished to laugh, but as they were not going to laugh in chorus, they talked, talked, talked. Guido Paolo nudged Martinez with his elbow and asked him:

‘Do you hear them, old man?’

‘Our guns ought to sound better on the other side.’

He pointed to the mountain with a wry glance.

‘If they were to hit us with one of these . . .’

Paolo shrugged his shoulders. The other speaker insisted:

‘Don’t you value your life?’

Paolo reacted too vehemently. He twisted his head round over his shoulder, and said almost without opening his mouth:

‘I value my life as much as anyone else. But if it is not to be risked for the cause, tell me what value my life has.’ Another who had not spoken before, raised his voice as if in anger:

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'We mind our own business. Killing us is not our job but the fascists' job.'

Everyone considered that during a short silence. The other man clinched the matter:

'Every man to his own job.'

The convoy reached Guadarrama—roofless houses, their front wall destroyed. The interiors of the rooms could be seen like a set of shelves. In one, a picture still hung on the wall, which amused Segura very much. Where the Escorial-Cercedilla road crossed the highway, there stood empty lorries and civil guards who had removed the patent leather from their tricorne hats because it reflected the sun. Their trousers had become baggy at the knees from sleeping in their clothing and that would demoralize them—usually so elegant—so that almost any day they might become traitors and desert to the enemy.

Once on foot, the company went into single file and the officers posted them for safety behind some ruined walls. Marquez went up to the General Staff. Meanwhile somebody raised the war-cry:

'Ra! ra! ra!'

But then the cry ceased, as if they were listening to the echo. Everything sounded differently in Guadarrama. There was silence, the silence of dead birds, which they noticed as soon as the motors of the lorries stopped. One of us looked all round, and, staring at a stripped acacia, said: 'Here we don't hear even a miserable sparrow!'

The silence wasn't broken by the machine-guns which here and there emitted short repetitions, or by the occasional shots, or even by the guns. All these noises only measured out the silence, plumbed it. A car came down Port Street, the chief street, at a speed unsuitable to the ground. The brake groaned at the curve, and the car rushed on again. It was passing between houses, and yet seemed to be in a desert. Looking at it, one could ask: 'To what distant and nameless country is that car going?'

'Ra! ra! ra! The Company of Steel will pass through!'

Metal-workers, who were also communists.

'Ra! ra! ra!'

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As soon as one began, all the others joined in. The last 'Ra!' sounded like the smashing of a rock.

'What are we going to do next?' someone asked as if he were speaking to himself.

Those in front looked up at the town. There were white clouds. The sun sometimes was hidden. Now and again the 'tacatac' of a machine-gun could be heard through the bottomless silence. A civil guard, trying to laugh, remarked, 'That's our Mary.'

So they had named a machine-gun which enfiladed the road. As the civil guard had not succeeded in raising a laugh, at least a real laugh, nobody paid any attention. When the 'Ra! ra! ra!' was raised again, another civil guard, who was trying to close the flap of his leggings over his baggy knee, stared at them in surprise. The war-cry sounded well. If there were sun, or the heat of other days, the hurrahs would go better, but in that changing air of lead and mother-of-pearl the 'Ra! ra! ra!' is also a pale and bitter wind. 'The Company of Steel will pass!' But where? No one had made a plan. No one cared.

The wait was too long. Perhaps in war there is an obsession in favour of moving. I have an obsession about open ground. The fear of being pegged to a spot; and here at a crossing of roads, most of all. It was a crossing that led nowhere, and as it was enfiladed, it was a barrier. That is the worst of roads during war. They are not roads. At each step one reaches a stopping-place.

The enemy fire got heavier, their shells passing overhead to fall near the bridge on the Villalba road. The militia were hearing them for the first time, but already they knew that war was war. Before Marquez came back, the light batteries began to attack a battalion which was ascending on the other road by Collado Mediano. But the town and its surroundings seemed deserted. I looked up towards it, to our roads of a few days ago, and thought of my friends. Afterwards I don't remember having searched for them in the front line (I never heard anything more of them). I could not search for them as I didn't know their names. If they are alive, let me tell them from here how glad I am.

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Only the drowsy guards remained at the crossroads. Telegrams were failing to pass the wires broken down from the posts, and soil was lodging in the thin tubes from a broken petrol tank. When Marquez returned, the long file of men stood up. A quick order passed along. The words passed from mouth to mouth. 'Locate' and 'attack.' The enemy must be found and, once found, his positions must be assaulted, if possible. No one knew where they were nor how many they were. The steep sierra, thick with pines and scrub, hid them. The file began to space out, and to move by creeping along the right-hand ditch of the road. Before they reached the sanatorium, they were saluted by rifle and machine-gun bullets. From there onwards they had to open out further under the hurricane of bullets from the uninterrupted fire.

'Ra! ra! ra!'

An ambulance came down at full speed. The new telephone installed by the staff had its black-tarred cables on the ground. In the interstices of the firing, the silence gave voice to the stump of a wounded tree or broken tile. When we had passed the villa of the General Staff, we had to deploy. The hostile shells were now high, but sometimes a rebound close at hand yelped like a wounded vixen.

Each looked at the other, seeking something to support his courage. I was back in the tracks of death and found them new, as if I had never walked in them before. Leaves cut down by the machine-guns fell softly on us, just as they used to fall on lovers in romantic autumns.

'Ra! ra! ra! The Company of Steel will pass!'

The bolts of rifles snapped, eager hands grasped the bomb in the belt, and the shrapnel called us to halt here and there with its harsh metallic voice. After passing the roadmenders' hut to the left and at the foot of Hispano-American sanatorium, and to the right and above Tablada, our guerilla disappeared among the trees and the little hills. In the sections to the right towards Valdelasierra and to the left by the resin-collectors' road, the mountain cracked with rifle fire. Seas of brushwood, craters of shells. Dead men with the faces of moles. Hair, hair, each head differently coloured. Behind every rock some unknown glow.

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Where was the enemy? At least we knew that there was none of them along the road we had traversed. Our guerilla force had covered rather more than two miles. An hour later the firing died down. Some sergeants crept forward along the ground, and, when the others tried to follow them, the fascist mortars burst into action. Opposite the first section, if a militiaman moved an invisible enemy machine-gun raged. Still from time to time 'Ra! ra! ra!' Where was the enemy? There was only one way of finding out. Seeing him. And as the eyes are in the face, it was necessary to show our faces. Trying to advance again, two of those who were alongside Marquez were left on the ground. Life breaks. Its thread is cut softly. But we are thinking too much about death. Perhaps we are not thinking about it, but it surrounds us and is talking to us. It tried to inspire us with confidence by its own arguments, dry and sterile as a reed. 'Before you were alive, they were thinking about me. Everyone thought about me. Who feared me? Not only the weak-nerved, the potentates, or simple nuns. Everyone feared me. And all of them were rolling into the abyss artlessly and simply, in spite of their resistance and panic. And these thousands of millions of individual catastrophes have caused neither sorrow nor loss to life. Among these millions some like you died in their shoes. It cannot be said that they lost their lives, but rather that life had gained them. Go on wearing your shoes, says Death. Don't fear me. Fear an empty life or a vile life.'

Forward! We shall know where the enemy is only when we see him, and we shall see him only when he sees us, when the poisonous eye of his machine-gun sees us, and when they spit at us.

'Ra! ra! ra! The Company of Steel will pass!'

The first Company of Steel advanced. When night came—we had neither eaten nor drunk all day—everyone searched in the dark, and little companies of three or four were formed. The fire ceased for a few hours. In the soothing silence, I thought of my family who had remained on the other side of the sierra. My group made a discovery. In the silence, our ears alert, we heard the noise of a stream of water falling on damp stones. A comrade crawled forward to the right, and

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the ground suddenly broke into a natural gully. The water sang in its depths. When the moon shone, we could see a hidden rivulet a few feet lower down. One of us three climbed down to drink, but when he was close, a machine-gun rattled on our left. There was a dead body beside the spring. The comrade was much excited, but not because of his thirst.

‘I saw the flash. The machine-gun is about ten yards from the road, on the level of the second pine.’

It was necessary to inform the captain. One of us went off, but almost at once a rifle was fired just behind him, and he came back telling us that we were cut off. No one was surprised. No one said anything. In the silence we could hear the water trickling down below, but we were no longer troubling about that. One of us suggested that we should try to reach the spring again. If we didn’t reach it, at least we should draw the fire of the machine-gun and be able to locate it exactly. The one who had climbed down before began to descend again. The spring was enfiladed and the machine-gun sounded again. There was a series of only three discharges. The flashes were red stars, perfect, symmetrical.

We couldn’t reach the water, but one of us took off his shirt. Another tore his into pieces which we joined to make a rope of several yards long, to the end of which we tied the other shirt, rolled into a bundle. Then we lowered it into the water and it came back soaked. We sucked it and all were able to quench their thirst. Then we set watches so that all three could get an hour or two of sleep. On our right some intermittent firing made us guess that our comrades were provoking the enemy, so as to locate their nests of mortars and machine-guns. I occupied myself for a time watching the flashlight signals from the heights to some spy in our rear-guard. It was treason speaking in a language which did not belong to it, a charming language of blue stars.

Shells began to fall round about us a little before dawn. Our artillery fired rather widely for more than half an hour. We longed to have been able to seize each shell with our hands and direct it so as to fall on the enemy. We began to advance once more, not forgetting the place where we had left the spring. We came across two other nests of machine-

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guns. In front we descried some guerillas upon which we were firing all the morning. The three nests were in tactical relation. We could consider that the enemy had been located in that sector. Towards the middle of the afternoon, the three ventured to give the war-cry: 'Ra! ra! ra!'

A reply came from close by, but they could not have been more than thirty. We two went down to the spring. Four comrades were on the other side of the ravine. They were of the colour of freshly ploughed land. Their lips were pinched and dry. I pointed to the water and they answered that they could not reach it. Down below, alongside the water, two comrades of ours lay dead. I told them to do what we had done. I thought they were about to do so, as they had bared their chests and had their shirts in their hands, but they replied something that I could not hear. We began to throw the shirt into the water, and after drinking, we carried it all sopping to our comrade. Our artillery had become silent, almost suddenly. At the same time the enemy's batteries began to fire quite unmolested. We were uneasy and uncertain, but the position became clear to us when three tri-motor bombers accompanied by a number of 'chaser' planes, appeared at a great elevation over the top of Alto de Leon. The squadron came over us. 'They are saving their bombs for the batteries,' we said with some hope. But they had load enough for everything. From time to time the mountain shuddered under the explosions. We endured it there with our bodies flat on the ground, waiting until fate should decide whether we were to be the victims or the survivors. Such uncertainty burns up even the best energies.

'How the motors sound inside one!' one of us said. 'Naturally, with the stomach and the guts empty.'

Our artillery was immobilized by the presence of the aeroplanes. The enemy took the opportunity of planting their shells where they pleased. The bombs from the aeroplanes fell within little more than a hundred yards, but apparently they were not causing losses.

We passed the second day without food. The shirt, always being wetted and then dried in the sun, became very white. At night, reinforcements arrived, and they also brought us

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something to eat. This time it was not sardines but tinned salmon. At dawn the reinforcing troops withdrew to a safer position, by order of the General Staff. The enemy tried to attack, as our movements made them think we were retreating.

We had to hold them back with hand-grenades. Many had fixed their bayonets and crouched like tigers. From a pine near us, from one of its high branches, they were firing on our group. A bullet passed through the arm of the one who had tried to make contact with the captain. When we located the sharpshooter, the three were convinced that it was a priest. However, he did not wear a soutane. We fired at him, and could see him sway and begin to fall, but he got hooked by his waistband, with which he must have tied himself as a support. There he hung, like a monstrous fruit, with his head, hands and feet hanging down. Now and again the wind shook the pine, and the body swayed gently whilst the tree groaned as if in protest.

Hunger and fatigue had changed our expressions, and we were nothing but eyes and ears. But the groups nearest to us were much more exhausted. For three days they were without a single drop of water. They also were carrying their shirts. The wounded comrade tried to bandage his arm. I helped him. As he saw the blood gushing he said:

‘Now I know why our colour is red. There is no colour more true than red.’

It was agreed to descend at dusk. Since the reinforcements had arrived, our rearguard was freed from enemies. The captain arrived before dusk and called out:

‘When you hear a third volley from our guns, everyone go down.’

The group next to us listened with their eyes popping out of their heads. We asked them if they had heard, and they nodded assent. The enemy’s aeroplanes arrived before our artillery began. This time human remains were thrown into the air with the torn ground near our group. Some hostile patrols tried to advance under cover of the aeroplanes. On our section nothing happened. We were able to exchange fire with the machine-guns of the second line on the flank

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which had passed to the right of the priest's tree. The sun began to sink over by the Escorial. A red and mauve sky covered the mountain. Wisps of smoke rose straight up from the pines, diffusing an odour of burnt resin.

We got up when we heard the signal, but we were much heavier than when we were ascending. A nervous cough shook my comrades from the belly to the shoulders. The three cannon shots were followed by many more, a real artillery battle. It was not for half an hour that we found a natural gorge in the shelter of which we could go down to the village.

When the moon came out, the first Company of Steel paraded behind the villa of the General Staff. Marquez passed his eye along the ranks. Seven were detached. Among them, he who had seen the first machine-gun. Three of the four who formed the group next to us were also selected. It was necessary to restore them with brandy and water.

In the shelter of the walls of the General Staff, we all felt safe. 'For this once,' we said egotistically. But we had not all come down. Half the company must have stayed up above there.

The seven went to the General Staff. Following the information they gave, the officers examined and compared the maps and at the same time sent orders to the batteries. Everything seemed to be assuming the air of responsibility that we had missed so much. The chiefs also seemed to be taking an interest in the physical state of the comrades:

'Three days without water?'

Questions and answers were equally mechanical. Everyone felt that it was an unnecessary politeness, and that it had no importance. The wounded man again asked the comrades of the group next us on the right, why they also had not thrown a shirt into the water. One of them replied by unfolding the shirt he still carried in his hand. There were blue stripes on it, also some numbers and marked points.

'The fact is', he said, 'that he', pointing to the other comrade, 'is a draughtsman.'

It was a map, and the enemy's positions over a section of more than two miles were indicated on it. They had also discovered two light cannon.

GUADARRAMA

'It was Paolo's idea.'

'Where is Paolo?'

No one answered, but we all understood. The wounded man kept on with the subject. 'Hadn't the rest of you shirt?'" Why didn't you throw one of them into the water?" They told us that they had made three copies, so that in case of the death of the others, there might be at least one to show his to the Staff. The wounded man said no more, but shook his hand so warmly that a little more blood came from his forearm and stained the bandage.

That night the fortification of the sector began. They discussed distances and took measurements on the dirty shirt. A map alongside it gave confirmation. Sappers did their heroic work with picks and planks in the dark.

The first Company of Steel was drawn up in the little garden of the hotel in shelter from 'Our Mary'. Marquez came out and gave the order to number up. The last man gave the number 'Seventy-three'.

Everyone raised his fist, and although a little more feebly, the war-cry rang out:

'Ra! ra! ra!'

These fortifications are still our lines to-day, March 14. The enemy has been unable to advance a step, neither with tanks nor with hand grenades, in spite of better German artillery and Junker and Caproni aeroplanes. Every day, every hour, our men hold back the enemy at these lines.

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CHAPTER VIII

MADRID BEFORE THE SIEGE

Madrid was carrying her glory well, after her triumph over the centres of insurrection in Carabanchel, the Montaña Barracks, the Pacifico, and convents such as that of the Dominicans at Atocha. The latter had been converted within twenty-four hours into forts, not because they had been attacked, but as centres of aggression. When militia attacked the convents, the monks had been two nights firing from the roofs on the expeditionary forces which were arriving at the Southern Station (Atocha) or leaving it. But such bizarre conduct on the part of monks was not so daring as it seems to us now, because they believed (their weakness had always been an incomplete sense of reality) that their triumph in Madrid and in the whole of Spain was only a question of a day or two.

All the workers' organizations remained on the side of the Government. And it was surprising that one did not hear the anarchists, or the socialists, or the communists speaking of their conquests to come, nor even make radical criticisms of the Government, or still less of Azaña, who personified exactly the spirit and feeling of the Popular Front as few persons in history have personified a cause. The movement might go farther, but it clustered its hopes round democracy and Azaña, who a few years ago they had blamed for great political blunders. I was not surprised. The same bodies, in April 1931, spontaneously organized guards round the Palacio de Oriente so that no one should enter while the King's family was still in Spain. That was not done by Alcalá Zamora nor

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by the other political leaders, but by the socialist and republican youth with their improvised armlets as citizen guards. And yet the King, the King personally, from rage and fear, a few months before, had ordered the shooting of the two idols of the republican movement, Galan and Garcia Hernandez, contrary to all the provisions in the code of military justice.

Madrid was full of refuges for children. The children of militia, the orphans of our heroes or of the officers and rebel leaders killed in the struggle, had been collected and lodged in mansions requisitioned for military purposes, from their owners, many of whom were enemies of the republic and had fled to join Franco. In the gardens, in the bright bedrooms, on the wide terraces, the children filled the air with laughter and shouts. The workers' organizations rivalled each other in looking after them. From the day after the victory, the first to benefit, the real gainers, were the children.

In return for its fidelity to the republic, the people received from the Government a reward which threatened in no respect the fundamental institutions of capital. The fact that the Ministry of Industry and Labour took measures to take over certain industries whose owners had been declared rebels, or nationalized railways, or offered the lands of the great feudal owners to the peasants who had been working on them, did not exceed the limits of what is done in European liberal States. That being so, I never doubted but that we should have the support of England and France. But either their services of information from Madrid had fallen into a foolish sensationalism, or they sympathized with the rebels, perhaps from that futile respect for following precedent which dominates the psychology of 'important persons' much more than we think. In any case, neither then, nor now, has the spontaneous nature of our movement been understood in governmental circles in these countries. It requires perverse judgment of a most extreme kind to interpret the joyful spirit of combativeness in Madrid as anything but a legitimate defence which did not exceed the declared policy of the leaders and did not break discipline, except in minor matters.

But our enemies have surpassed us in propaganda in other countries, and they have done it by using every opportunity

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and every form of humbug. They prefer details which may excite repugnance. In a German leaflet translated into French and distributed widely in France, I have seen the photograph of the steps of a church with on them a severed human head. I recognized the head because I had seen it before, fixed to the cap of the radiator of a car which bore on its windscreen the initials of the F.A.I. and C.N.T. The photograph was genuine. The only thing wrong was the suggestion of its being a human head and not a stone carving. The photograph did not explain that, and the Nazis used it for their calumnies. I remember the fact well, because I myself stopped the F.A.I. car in front of the Fine Arts Museum, and explained to those in it the danger of carrying the head, precisely because of the cameras of our enemies. These comrades saw the point at once, and jumping from their seats hurried to remove it. But that childish hatred of the images in churches arises from the fact that under them Spanish reactionaries protect the most barbarous and the most cruel of their privileges or of their provocations, and that produces an equally childish reaction.

The enemy propaganda has been carried still farther against us. Hitler and Mussolini knew very well that we didn't go into the streets to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, but to defend ourselves against the menace of a military dictatorship. They knew quite well what the joy of victory was in Madrid, but they were anxious to show the good rentiers of France and England the Red bogey. I have seen in other propagandist pamphlets a photograph in equally bad taste. It shows the steps of a Barcelona church—the fascists know how effective religious allusions are, although they themselves show religious things very scanty respect—with three mummies placed upright against the wall. I am far from defending those who are guilty of bad taste of that kind, but I am certain that to put these 'venerable and miraculous relics' in the porch of a church helps to destroy superstition, and cannot really upset the moral equilibrium of the religious authorities who used to invite the public to kiss the relics, and tried to get money from that insanitary practice, as the priests did, by placing collecting-boxes at the

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feet of the relics. The reaction of the crowd in Barcelona no doubt was barbarous, but not so much so as the religious practice of those who had provoked it. The fascists know that very well, but they trust to the immediate production of disgust and fright in the good bourgeois when he sees the photograph.

Another circumstance on which they laid great stress was the execution of fascists. Some figures and notes may clear up that question. In Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona there were executions apart from the courts of justice, in the first days. But in these three cities armed fighting took place before these executions, bloody attacks on the town, monstrous provocation of the unarmed civil population who had to go with empty hands, strewing the road with their dead, to capture machine-guns and cannon from the enemy. Under such circumstances it cannot surprise anyone that in Barcelona seven thousand four hundred were killed. A city of a million and a half inhabitants driven into war could not help reacting in that way. The same can be said of Madrid, although the figures were not so high there, and where the absence of the passion for vengeance has allowed unmolested and free life not only to pacific people whose views and habits are strongly reactionary, but to Deputies of the Ceda and of its ally, the radical party, and thus to active political enemies. All those who abstained from actually taking up arms against the people not only have not been molested, but have enjoyed all the measures of protection given to the civil population by the Government, and afterwards by the Junta of Defence. We all know of many reactionaries in the background. We know who they are and where they live. More than one night I have taken in a car to his house from the 'Cultura Popular' the radical Deputy Dario Perez, whose political leader had joined Franco. And none of these people has been forced to make a declaration of sympathy with us.

Only think that at the same time the fascists have assassinated 27,000 persons (more than a third of them women) in Granada, where there was no fighting, and in Zamorra (a little town of 15,000 inhabitants, far from all the fronts) 5,500, and in Pamplona, which has always been at peace, 17,000, and among them women, for having 'married civilly

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and not canonically', and men for 'having voted for the Popular Front'. Let us remember also that they have assassinated all the liberal professors of universities and colleges, and their women, all the pacific Protestant pastors, and the Catholic priests who refused to proclaim the glories of Franco from their pulpits. And all that happened and still happens in the towns ruled by the fascists from the first moment of their rebellion, where no one has opposed them, where no shots have sounded except those of the executioners of the Falange or of the Requetés. Let us keep in our minds the fact that by now there have been more than 750,000 executions in the rebel camp, and that they have had the horrifying virtuosity of exterminating whole families because in them there has been a single prominent republican. In view of all that there is little need to explain the executions we have carried out, infinitely less numerous, nearly always carried out decently, and easily understood because of the anger of those who have been attacked violently in their homes. Let us add that the people has secular reason for the accumulation of hatred and vengeance, and, to employ a fascist argument which now is turning against themselves, there is the fact that sometimes the 'masses lack moral sensibility and humanity'. When our statistics come to be made, biologists, anthropologists and investigators of these phenomena will receive a great surprise. Our struggle is in fact full of lessons of humanity, nobility and moral elevation. To many, however, this will not be new, because it could be seen in the revolution in Asturias (October 1934), and the statistics of Asturias have gone round the world without Gil Robles and Lerroux being able to refute them.

But besides, even in the most tragic moments of suppression of the rebels, suspected civilians were never murdered in their houses. It was only after concrete facts of aggression that they were arrested and taken to the workers' centres or to the Committee of Public Safety. Workers' committees or the ordinary tribunals tried them. The anxiety for legal form and responsibility sometimes reached to childish extravagances. I was told that before condemning to death a fascist caught with arms in his hands, a labourer of a C.N.T. syndicate, at a time when the fight required everyone to be every-

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where at once, undertook himself, in the absence of others, the public defence and the public prosecution. He made himself first the defender and afterwards the prosecutor. The cold-blooded murder in their houses, because of suspicion, that is to say of fear, of fifteen hundred civilians in a single night, so far has been done only by the Nazis, and that, moreover, not during war, but under all the guarantees of the Third Reich and the solemn majesty of a Government enjoying the security which comes from having all the power in its hands.

Madrid was living under these conditions, its own anxiety intensified by waves from the international uneasiness. In Guadarrama, in Somosierra, in Peguerinos, the rebel hordes of Mola and Franco were being held back by sheer bravery without more than rifles and a few machine-guns. Little artillery and that bad. In Extremadura the militia allowed themselves to be killed before giving up territory to the more powerful German and Italian armaments. The Governments of Hitler and Mussolini had begun to pour frenetically into Spain armaments of war and masses of military forces.

They were trying to prevent not the triumph of a dictatorship of the proletariat, of which there was no question, but the defeat of the Spanish fascism which had offered them raw materials and naval and aviation bases. Moreover, the rout of Spanish fascism could open new perspectives to the German and Italian peoples, and the Spanish democracy, after its triumph, would try to consolidate it by the discovery of the new forms which come into existence after great convulsions, and might bring new strength and increased vigour to the European democracies which fascism wished to exterminate. Our Popular Front after its triumph would be more compact than ever, and above all things would preserve its popular nature, for the great problem of Spain, the problem which the whole country is discussing during a struggle that is enfeebling it, without solving it, is our democratic revolution. International fascism knows that very well, but if it cannot use terror within its own frontiers and stir up the 'Red terror' outside them—its two fundamental arguments—what can it say? In a clean discussion, these two arguments cannot



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be sustained, but when the third argument is used, and then takes the first place, it is impossible to discuss or to talk. That third argument, of which they took possession by surprise in Italy and Germany, is the machine-gun. In Spain they wish to impose it on us in a sea of blood, but in a sea of blood we shall take it from them.

The time that I was in Madrid I spent thinking and talking about that, like everyone else. The framework of law and legitimacy remained intact, and the whole of our triumph, however great it might be, was within the limits of the republican constitution. Since then, in proportion to the increase of the wholesale assassinations committed by the rebels, the shadow of responsibility has covered a wider field in which, moreover, the help of Hitler and Mussolini is forcing us continually to increase our efforts. The triumph of the Spanish workers therefore is now foreshadowing new political orientations. Now we are going to make democratic forms more advanced than those which the Constituent Cortes established. Some day, not very far off, the unanimous will of the Spaniards will display itself, and no one must be surprised if, during the superhuman effort we have made, and to which we have been forced, new forms rise to the surface, forms of which I was speaking, and which a wise man could foresee, if only by approaching and listening to the different sections of the fighting anti-fascists. What forms will they be? No one can venture to prophesy, but quite easily we can all see that the communist will sacrifice some of his basic principles to reach agreement with the republican. We all see that he is accepting forms of socialization which formerly he would not have tolerated, and we see the anarchist accepting the idea of power and authority. And every day that passes, all parties see the atmosphere being impregnated a little more with syntheses made in the social experiences of the last few years. In any case, it will be a step towards solutions which will form the heart of western civilization. It is in these solutions, inevitably democratic, that civilization will find the force to preserve itself and make it enduring.

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I called various friends on the telephone. All were displaced from their normal lives. In the case of one house, I was told to ring up the 'Cultura Popular'. In another: 'He will be at the "Alianza".' I tried to go to the first of these organizations, but found that it had changed its address. It no longer occupied a little room in a modern beehive (£1 a month, telephone included), but a huge mansion in Sacramento Street, in the former wealthy part of Madrid. These requisitions, made after taking an inventory of objects of artistic value and the depositing of them with the National Junta for Requisitions, put the cultural and political organizations in the best conditions for work. We soon occupied palaces of three stories with a garden, several telephones, pier-glasses on the walls, luxurious suites of chairs. It was all rather excessive, and we had to consider removing suits of armour of the sixteenth century and great indolent easy chairs. The comrades of 'Cultura Popular' offered me quarters in their house whilst I stayed in Madrid.

The workers in 'Cultura Popular' were a set of University young men and women. Among them, as in all the old or new organizations for work, there was a delegate from each party of the Popular Front. The communist delegate was a librarian from Aragón who knew several languages, and worked so regularly that it seemed automatic. He was of rather an ascetic disposition and had a strong country accent. Apart from the natural sympathy of two persons from the same province, I found that we judged things very much in the same way. In discussion we nearly always agreed on the most different subjects.

The workers in 'Cultura Popular' also lived there. Thus they saved time and also walking at night, for the work began at seven in the morning with making up parcels of printed matter for hospitals and barracks, and continued all day with arranging lectures, cinema exhibitions, plays, and the formation of travelling libraries to be sent to the fronts. The work lasted until late at night, and it was more convenient to stay on to sleep. The palace, which was arranged entirely for the gloomy and solemn idleness of Spanish aristocrats, had been changed into a hive of work. In the first month more than

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three hundred libraries had been organized, and 'Cultura Popular', which had constructed two travelling exhibitions on lorries, had visited the nearest fronts in noisy caravans which announced their passage through towns by the music of loud-speakers. They also had four light cars on which they went round the barracks and hospitals daily on press service. They distributed the newspapers of the day, both the industrial ones and the political organs of the parties and syndical groups. In all their activity there was spontaneous and cheerful order. The organization was controlled by an Andalusian, twenty-four years old. He acted as president of the national committee, and was a veteran of the students' struggles against fascists and monarchists. He had been director of the Federation of University Students (the famous and heroic FUE, *Federación Universitaria Escolar*), and put into all his work a fiery vehemence combined with some political tact. 'Cultura Popular' was then the best cultural organization born under the war. I felt much at home in that circle, as it corresponded closely with my interpretation of culture. For me the University, rather than the administrative machine it had come to be, was a unity of the whole life of the country, full of the vital breath of the people. A cultural and ambitious country, with culture really alive, ought to include in its universities all the forms of life and activity of the people, and receive in that way a stimulating material to be condensed by them into a synthesis.

On the upper story there were a number of clean and comfortable cubicles which must have been used by the tutors and governesses of the duchess's children. The stately bedrooms and luxurious salons with their great beds and crystal chandeliers we turned into book-stores. On Louis Quinze consoles of great value we piled up the publications of 'Cenit', 'Juventud' and 'Aguilar'. Whilst the shelves were being made, over a hundred thousand books, requisitioned, presented or purchased, were temporarily heaped up everywhere. The house was well provided with telephones, baths and kitchens, which made our work much more easy. As the palace was near old suburbs of the people—between the Rastro, the Vistillas and the Plaza de España—it was very suitable for its new mission.

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I was there as a guest who stayed for two or three days from time to time, and brought the spirit of the fronts, and to some extent took back the spirit of 'Cultura Popular'. I was the 'soldier' among these comrades of the organization. Among the soldiers, whether I liked it or not, I was the writer. I wrote dozens of articles in the daily fly-sheets on the walls, and in the newspapers of the trenches. Sometimes I arrived with an order of the Staff in places far removed from the possibility of any literary effort; and I have had to abandon the order—and an article written under shell-fire.

All those who worked in 'Cultura Popular' also carried out the duties of nocturnal vigilance—guardians of the night. They had five or six rifles, a few hundred cartridges, and, each of them, a revolver. Also on their trips to the fronts, if the road were not quite safe, they asked for an escort of militia. Their activity was steeped in political and cultural enthusiasm. As they were all young, their enthusiasm gave a return of extreme efficiency. The organization received no subvention from the State. They had the benefit of certain facilities which the other organizations gave them, so that they might get petrol, books and office necessities. Those who worked there were rated as militia, and received a daily pay of ten pesetas (value from four shillings downwards). After a few weeks of activity, 'Cultura Popular' became very well known. As usually happens when people do not trouble about the spectacular side of their mission or are puffed up about belonging to it, prestige came to them.

I dwell on the work of 'Cultura Popular' because for me it was rest, it was 'behind the lines', and thinking of it made everything easier. What a store of moral health in that set of young people! How spontaneous their efforts, what easy harmony, and how logical the relation between their feelings and their work!

CHAPTER IX

TOWARDS THE CORDOBA FRONT

On my return to the Montaña barracks the president said to me:

‘We are about to go on an expedition to the Córdoba fronts. Would you like to come?’

It would be my first expedition of that kind, and I was delighted. We took with us the two travelling libraries full of books and reviews, and on the road we held hurried meetings in the villages. On the Córdoba fronts we distributed libraries, and tried to inundate them with political propaganda. I had ten days leave of which I could take advantage by going through our territory towards the south, and ascertaining the situation there over an area of more than four hundred miles.

We started in the afternoon, had supper in Aranjuez and slept in Ocaña. We were invited to supper by the Popular Front committee of Aranjuez and as there were twenty of us and the hour was late, the food was modest, but plentiful. The delegate of the Republican Party thought it suitable to criticize the defects of the meal and did so aloud. We called him to order openly, which was awkward, but we had to do it as the delegates of the Aranjuez committee took it to heart and felt humbled. Our comrade shut himself up in his shell and was taciturn for several days. Then he saw that we had all forgotten the incident, and he forgot it too, at least apparently, but as he did not repeat his bad behaviour, clearly he had learned his lesson.

As we were going out of Aranjuez we saw that the peasants

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were perturbed lest anything should happen to us, for the control of the roads was not very efficient at night. And so we organized the expedition in the form of a military column. A light car in the vanguard, scouting. Two armed comrades went in it with me, and I had a small magazine mauser. Less than half a mile behind, the lorries followed, and still farther back, another light car as rearguard. If we were attacked we should fall back on the lorries, which were to travel at a walking pace. The rearguard car would come up to the lorries, and its occupants would stay on guard with them but reversed, and with its engine running, ready to make for the nearest town if reinforcements were needed. If we were to rejoin the lorries, we should deploy to one side or the other, according to the direction of the attack. The password by which we could identify each other in the dark was 'South Front'. In the night, in the plain of Don Quijote, all that seemed rather dramatic, and we tried to compensate for it by treating the idea of an attack as a joke, but none the less we carried out our precautions literally.

We reached Ocaña at midnight. We slept there for a few hours, and set out again before dawn. I have forgotten to relate that with us was a delegate of the C.N.T., the director of the national organ of the anarchist press. He was a man of about forty with long grey hair hanging down over his forehead, a ready speaker, but not very politic, as in all his speeches he insisted too strongly that the Spanish people would never tolerate any kind of dictatorship, either 'Black' or 'Red'. He laid so much stress on the word 'Red' that he seemed somewhat treacherous. And so we asked him:

'Have you ever heard any of us speak of red dictatorships?'

'No.'

'Since the beginning of the war have you read in any socialist or communist periodical any affirmation of the dictatorship of the proletariat?'

'No, that is true,' he admitted.

'Perhaps among the communists who have gone to the fronts and have died there, you have heard someone say that he was risking his life for the dictatorship of the proletariat?'

'No, no,' he admitted, after a little reflection.

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‘Very well, from where do you get your notion about the danger of that dictatorship?’

He declared that it was a foreboding. He promised us that he wouldn’t use that little phrase again, but on the first opportunity out it came once more. Then he excused himself on the ground that it was something in his subconsciousness beyond his control. I tried to wound his self-esteem as an orator (which is very brittle in the case of some anarchists) by saying to him:

‘The fact is that you have a ready-made phrase, a kind of mental handrail, and you can’t avoid it.’

That succeeded, at least at first. Instead of struggling against his forebodings, he descanted on the natural goodness of mankind (Rousseau), the strength of the whole people (Bakunin), the spontaneous organization of atoms, and the consequent denial of chaos as a natural state (Reclus), by which he implied that no one should fear to cause destruction because nature, with its hatred of chaos, would impose a new order. We warned him that with his indifference about chaos it might well happen that it would not be nature but Franco who would impose the new order, but he referred to Linnæus and Fabre to remind us of social insects. In the end he called us sophists and was quite contented. I couldn’t feel indignant with him, for I remembered the many anarchist comrades who, joined with the communists, socialists and republicans, were working heroically and intelligently for our victory.

In the middle of the day we crossed the Sierra Morena. The defiles, the classic passes of Despeñaperros, were being guarded by armed peasants. After having examined our passports carefully and allowed us to go on, one of the peasants went into the middle of the road and, with a trumpet like that of a railway signalman, gave a signal to the next guards to let us pass. They asked us about how things were going in Madrid, and assured us that here, where they were, the enemy would not pass.

We reached Montoro about three in the afternoon. The general headquarters of the section is there. Montoro is a city of some ten thousand inhabitants, with an air of the south-east of Spain rather than of Andalucía. It has a solid

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and massive appearance, different from the gay spaciousness of Andalucian cities. Some of the comrades stayed there to arrange quarters. We left the lorries in front of a beautiful cathedral, dark yellow in colour, like the prow of a ship. We loaded all the material we should require on one of the light cars, and arranged to follow towards the front line in two tourist cars. The wife of one of the comrades, who had arrived from Madrid, insisted on coming with us. She was a pretty Andalucian, dark, fragile but spirited. There was something crystalline about her which triumphed over the dust of the roads and sleepless nights, from which she would appear fragrant and translucent. Fine glasses ring as the wind passes over them or when they are rubbed with the tip of a finger. She also, when one spoke to her or glanced at her, however ordinary the words or commonplace the glance, without knowing it, unconsciously responded like fine crystal. She worked in 'Cultura Popular' and was engaged with the libraries for children's hostels and the programmes of cinemas and theatres for children. When the work was most heavy, when there was most hurry and most confusion, she never ceased to ring out like clear crystal. She was very disappointed at finding we meant to leave her in Montoro, and she came to me begging me to intercede. I spoke to the comrades and in the end they agreed to take her. Her presence would be a comfort anywhere. The fact that we had brought her from Madrid without a breakdown, or without upsetting her, showed how good the road was. That convinced the comrades.

We arrived at Adamuz by a country road which was in good order, but we raised so much dust that the following car had to keep behind to avoid it. We passed by vineyards and olive-groves. As we entered the town the women hid in the doorways, and waited to raise their fists in salute until we had done so. They were very nervous. The town had been in the power of the fascists, who had murdered and robbed as they pleased. When the peasants recaptured it with sporting guns, loaded with small shot, and a few dynamite cartridges, they had captured the sons of some of the big landowners of the district. That was a fortnight ago.

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'Where are you keeping them?' we asked, expecting them to reply that they had shot them, but we were glad to hear that they had only imprisoned them.

'We shot three', replied a peasant, 'who had murdered the chiefs of the peasants' syndicate. But these others, although we took them with arms in their hands, aren't so dangerous. Of course,' he added stoically, 'if a time comes when those of us who are still here have to join the others to fight at a distance from the town, there will be nothing for it,' and he made a grave gesture of sincere resignation, 'there will be nothing for it but to leave the old ones tranquil.'

In other words, that they would decide to shoot their prisoners only as a last resort. These prisoners were the feudal gentry of the neighbourhood who had been sowing hatred for years and years. Soon after the victory of the Rights in the 1934 elections, I heard a man, his eyes shining with hate, tell two large landowners of that province:

'I'll lose no time in seeing that these labourers dance on the hills.'

He meant to say that he would see them reduced to such a state of misery that they would have to go outside his estates, and live like goats, nibbling the herbage. They succeeded to some extent, for the peasants in many cases during the winter of 1935-36 had to boil the roots of wild plants as their only food. And yet these same peasants, from whose culture a high moral standard was not to be expected, respected the lives of the landowners 'until an extreme case should come', and only to secure peace for the old people of the village before leaving it.

The rebels sowed desolation during the seven days in which the village was in their hands. There was not a single peasant's house in which some relation had not been murdered. The chiefs of the syndicate were marched on foot to the cemetery, where they were forced to dig their own graves. Whilst they were digging, the gentry of the Falange taunted them: 'Don't you say that the earth is for those who labour in it? Now you see you are going to get your share. You can keep that piece of land over you until the Day of Judgment.' Others of them said: 'You needn't dig so deep; it is already

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deep enough for a dog's grave.' Or they would advise them to leave a little step where the head would lie, 'so that they would be more comfortable.' The peasants went on digging in silence. One of them tried to escape, but they caught him after wounding him in the leg. He was kept three days in prison without attention to the wound, and then they made him be present at the shooting of others. On the fourth day they made him come out and took him again to the cemetery. The peasants told us that they did not shoot them in the usual way with a picket, but they amused themselves by shooting them with revolvers, as in target practice. They compelled the unfortunate man to open a grave, telling him that it was for someone else, and when that was done they made him lie down at full length in it, 'to see if it would hold a human body'. When he had done so, they fired on him and without seeing if he had been killed, ordered the gravedigger to fill in the grave. He said to them: 'He seems to be moving still.'

The falangists pointed their revolvers at him and warned him to take care, because 'many a man is hung by his tongue'. The peasants of Adamuz made the comment:

'What wickedness! Who could have thought that educated men who have always lived like gentlemen could fall so low.'

Then they added:

'Whether there is war or not, a man is always a man.'

A little old woman came crying, and laid hold of the sleeve of a comrade:

'Tell this to the Madrid Government, sir,' she said, 'tell them this. They killed my Antoñito but only because they tied his hands first. He went like this, like this, the son of my soul,' the woman joined her two white wrists, as thin as those of a child, 'and it was only that way that they could finish him off. My boy could have fought all those bloody gentry with his fists, but they tied him with string, like this, like this!'

And again she showed us her crossed wrists.

'And the husband of her,' pointing to another peasant woman in black who was sobbing and chewing her white handkerchief, with her head resting against the door, 'they

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killed him in his own bed from which he couldn't rise. Ill from going to the olive harvest, an old man, and him enduring the winter chills without enough food. And when he kept to his bed because he couldn't stand, the masters themselves came with revolvers and finished him off. He died, poor man, in his bed like a little bird, without saying a word.'

We could not get over our astonishment. Why did they kill these old men? From what lust for blood and cruelty? The old woman in a rush of words, explained it to us.

'What did for the husband of this neighbour, is that two winters ago he went with other two to ask for a rise of a penny in the olive harvest wages. But he didn't even speak. He went as the oldest of the labourers, and it was the others who spoke, the young ones.'

Everywhere we came across the track of crime. They told us about the death of the victims with details of such a nature as to make us think not of a war but of a collective moral madness which had come like a burning and putrid wind from the rebel camp. In the Middle Ages it was said, and it is still said in some villages, that when epidemics come the 'atmosphere is corrupted'. Then and to-day that is true of Franco's camp. Assassination had become part of the regular habits of his people. The falangists and the traditionalists took communion in the morning, and before beginning their political work for the day, used to go round to the jail and accompany ten or twelve to the cemetery. For half an hour they had target practice on them, and could then go back to their houses, kiss their children, and talk to them about morality, the family and the country. A man who escaped from Córdoba told us some monstrous details. They had forced a young assistant professor of the Institute to take up arms, but he took the first chance of crossing over to the loyal troops. Their revenge fell on the family, which was gradually exterminated. His wife had a son six months old, still at the breast. The mother and child were imprisoned. They did not allow the mother to have linen to change the child's clothing, or water to wash it. The mother lost her milk, and they did not even allow the child to be fed artificially. They were in that state for twenty-five days, after which they wrested the

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child, half dead with hunger, from its mother's arms, and took her to the priest for confession. Then they took her to the cemetery and killed her.

'Up to now', our informant told us, 'they have killed some nine thousand persons, counting men and women.'

They showed us a Córdoba newspaper, which we read eagerly. It was a medley of stupidity, deliberate infamy, and of the kind of degenerate sensuous poetry which made childish rhymes and spoke of the Moors who 'came from the crescent moon'. We mourned over such pitiful wickedness, Spanish blood perverted by pleasure in crime, by pride in its own force, a force which was nothing but an executioner's repression of moral inhibitions. They wished to build a myth of justice on crime, and what they were doing was to widen the channels of the torrent into which they would all fall, drowned in the blood they were spilling.

Meantime Queipo de Llano, a few miles off, was murdering by thousands, having all the workers whose names were on the rolls of the syndicates shot *en masse*, on the pretext that they had tried to strike. Amongst the victims were women, who begged for mercy with tears. Hundreds of these women in Córdoba and Seville and Granada were shot after having seen their husbands die, shot with their hungry and half-naked children clinging madly to their skirts. And Queipo, in his drunkard's voice, kept proclaiming on the radio that he represented order, the family and morality.

We left our woman comrade in Adamuz. She grumbled, although still with her crystal-like resonance. But from there onwards the country was unsafe. The cavalry patrols of the enemy were active and there had been isolated attacks. The very day before an incident had cost the life of one of the city militia. He was on guard at cross-roads. In an adjoining olive-grove an individual appeared, about five and forty years old, holding himself well, but rather dazed and feverish. The guard did not recognize him, although he was the parish priest, for he was in civilian dress. He called the militia-man by name and asked him for water.

When the militia-man put down his rifle—when the town was recaptured they had got two dozen rifles from the fascists

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—and began to untie his water-bottle, the unknown man stuck a knife in his belly, telling him:

‘You won’t recover from that in a dozen years.’

The guard fell, and the other four who formed the picket came up at his cries. The aggressor tried to escape, but they shot him down. A peasant who described the incident to me said:

‘This misfortune happened because these other peasants wouldn’t listen to me when I told them that we ought to seize the priest and jug him. They said that they weren’t against religion, if it behaved decently. Now you have it. That’s their decency.’

And added:

‘What good do we get from not attacking religion if the priests attack us?’

Other peasants declared that there were priests in neighbouring villages who were ‘friends of the poor’, and as such had not been molested, but the discontented man would have none of that. ‘Priests’, he declared, ‘are inhuman by nature. They begin by not marrying, which is not decent.’ In the mouth of that peasant the word ‘decent’ covered everything. With a serious and solemn winsomeness in which it was not certain whether it was a joke or not, he uttered the following:

‘The priest is the only animal who sings when one of his kind dies.’

The others laughed complaisantly and commented:

‘The comrade is always talking about that.’

We went on towards Villafranca de Córdoba, leaving our woman comrade in the town-house with two or three members of the local committee. They saw that she was slender, with a fragile city beauty, and asked us if she were from Madrid.

When we told them that was so, they looked at each other in a pleased way and remarked:

‘Then all the country, up to the capital, is with us, and all is safe.’

That comforted them as we had foreseen. Soon after leaving the town we met a group of seven riders on fine black ponies. With their flexible loins, sharp profiles, Córdoba hats,

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the butt of the rifle resting on their thighs, and the reins in the other hand, these country men had a true campaigning grace. They reined in their restless ponies and, in passing, advised us:

‘When you see Villafranca, go quickly because you’ll see it about a mile off, and that ground is sometimes raked by the fascist guns.’

We bore it in mind. The road was bordered by terraces and little hills, and we could not see far ahead or at the sides. There was more dust than on the previous stretch, which the wagons raised, leaving behind them a thick cloud gilded by the sun. The second car followed us at a distance of about two hundred yards and our dust mingled with theirs. We were not farther apart because we had agreed to keep close together.

Fifty minutes travelling brought us opposite Villafranca, down in a valley. The road wound down a large hillock. We must have been completely visible to the enemy camp as their front line was a little less than a mile beyond the town. We hurried, and were in the square in a minute. As we stopped we saw groups of armed peasants running towards the outside of the town to reinforce their comrades. We could hear rifles and machine-guns. We asked what was happening. Nobody took notice of us.

Ten minutes later the same groups returned and two peasants of the local committee came to us from them. We told them who we were and they received us with a kind of friendly surprise. We left with them all the material we had brought from Adamuz. The library, the pamphlets, the reviews and the placards. One of the chiefs asked us if we had come from Madrid expressly, and shook us by the hand. They exchanged pleased glances. We enquired about the alarm, and at that moment the mayor, who had come back, joined the group, and told us that we, the missionaries of ‘Cultura Popular’, had won a battle without getting out of our cars. We didn’t understand. They explained to us. ‘The dust raised by the two cars made the enemy think that a strong reinforcing column had arrived. Our people had been attacking the enemy, who, after resisting a few minutes, re-



Group of Dynamiters

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tired to other trenches in disorder, leaving behind more than twenty rifles and a machine-gun.' We all congratulated ourselves on our good fortune.

They told us that ours was the first help they had received, and they were hurt because they had not been sent a rifle or a single militiaman.

'But then', we asked, 'with what did you fight?'

'We have a few rifles captured from the enemy. Now we have twenty more. But most of the comrades have to use their shotguns. The women and the old men spend the day and part of the night making munitions. One of the comrades goes regularly round the poultry and game shops in the towns in the neighbourhood to buy empty cartridges. We fill them here. Come and see.'

They took us to a large shed in which about twenty women and old men were at work. There was a lighted furnace in the back. With coal and a blacksmith's bellows they raised the temperature to the melting point of lead. In a corner of the shed nearly two tons of new gas-piping was piled up.

'These', said a comrade, pointing to them with his hand, 'were to bring water to the town, but when we have won, there will be plenty of pipes in the town, don't you think?'

Two old men were cutting the lead with axes into lengths which they threw into the melting-pot. When the lead was melted, they poured it into little moulds like thimbles. From these came out, still hot, spherical or cylindrical bullets of the size to fit their guns. Women, at the other end of the shed, were filling the cartridges and piling them in neat rows in boxes.

'Here at the side', the peasant told us with pride, 'they are also making dynamite cartridges.'

They were also making, they told us, powder for bombs with touch-cord. 'For a month', they added, 'no one here has tasted sugar. We are saving it all to make explosives.'

There was no need to raise the spirits of the peasants there. What they needed were rifles and machine-guns. Just as in Adamuz, so in Villafranca, they asked for leaflets by José Diaz. At first I was surprised by the popularity of the secretary of the Communist Party in a parish far from the great

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highways, as I did not understand how propaganda could reach it. But my surprise was removed when I found that José Diaz was a native of one of these little towns.

We spoke to the peasants from one of the lorries. We confined ourselves to a minute description of the situation in the other fronts so that they could have a general idea of the war. And we explained to them the work of the Popular Front in the organization of agrarian production and wealth, so that they might associate their struggle with social progress. The democratic revolution controlled by workers and peasants spread its perspectives before that handful of heroes under the increasing rattle of machine-guns. The meeting ended with loud cheers for the republic and for the Popular Front Government. We began our journey back to Adamuz, commenting on the significant fact that the peasants would not have cheered the revolution with totalitarian dogmas.

CHAPTER X

A BLINDED BOY

We found our woman comrade in Adamuz surrounded by the wives of the members of the committee, who had come to greet her on the suggestion of their husbands. They were telling her of the difficulties of daily life arising from the war, and our comrade told them about life in Madrid and of her impressions of the provinces she had passed through on her journey. They had brought her a bouquet of carnations, having cut almost all there were in their own gardens and in those of their neighbours. Our comrade was greatly moved by so much simple and cordial politeness, and afterwards praised highly the natural courtesy and sense of these women.

She told us new examples of fascist terrorism. We had not asked the peasants in Villafranca about the terrorism which ruled whilst the fascists were in possession of the village—there was a moment when so much misery overwhelmed us, and when we felt it to be a pain and a disgrace to be fellow countrymen, even geographically, of these hyenas. Besides, incidentally, they had told us that when the fascists had entered the village they found it nearly empty.

Our comrade took us towards a little square near by, and showed us there a six-year-old boy with his eyes bandaged. The boy was trying to make a sand castle by pressing in his hands the soil he had scraped up. He had not yet learned the games of the blind, and was trying in vain to play at his old ~~games~~. Our comrade told us:

‘He is blind. A Moor violated and murdered his mother in front of him. Then he went off, but returned afterwards to put out the child’s eyes.’

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He put out his eyes, but they could not have been those eyes which he wished to extinguish, but the others which would remain graven in his imagination for ever. There are infantile glances which only those can endure who themselves have clean imaginations. The Moor would retain these eyes in his soul to the last moment of his life, or he would not have thought it necessary to come back to tear them out. But on the other hand the child himself would have the image graven on his mind for ever. In the dreams of his adolescence, before he was quite grown up, how the impression would grow! He would feel himself helpless in a life in which, so far as he knew, human powers served only for shame and crime. I recalled those Moors of the Moroccan settlements, human cases distorted before maturity, intermediate between man and beast. They were reared in physical and moral wretchedness and then they were employed precisely because of their warped natures, in Spain, as 'elements for the salvation of the country'. It required a degenerate like Franco for it to be possible that such half-humans from the tribes of the interior of Morocco should come to violate our women and to quench the light in the eyes of our children. But by such terrible acts of savagery they have written their own sentences in history, and, more directly and promptly, before the popular tribunals of Spain.

I took the child in my arms:

'Where is your father?'

'He has gone to the front to punish the fascists.'

'To punish them.' For the boy the father was all-powerful, and his punishment must fall on the murderers like a blight which would dry up the fields and poison the waters. And in a sense it was so.

I was too moved to tell him, 'Your father will live among our heroes, and to-morrow will share our glory, but, if he dies', I thought, 'you will be the child of everyone. Just as your father's curse will dry up the rivers of the fascists and scorch their fields, so our blessing will open all roads before your feet. Three millions of proletarians will lend you their eyes, that you may see, my boy.'

We went off. For nearly half an hour we were silent. We

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were absorbed, and if we spoke, it was to utter an exclamation which gave expression to the reflections which were the same in all our consciences.

We got back to Montoro by nine in the evening. The mayor, a very intelligent young man of thirty years, was a veteran socialist. He had succeeded in reorganizing the economic life of the municipality in a few days on an original basis which arranged matters to the taste of everyone. Work certificates were accepted by the bank on the credit of the municipality, which was secured on requisitioned rebel property, and on large deposits of oil from the last harvest. These certificates were the only money valid within the community. The municipality itself arranged payments to other towns which had to be made in money, and thus speculation and hoarding were prevented. Capitalists more or less unfriendly to the republic had to buy certificates for cash, which increased the economic power of the municipality and also the well-being of the working community, since it raised the real value of the certificates above their nominal value. Anarchists, socialists and communists had accepted the system, and the mayor wished to propose it to neighbouring towns. It was a healthy movement, as it gave work its true place in the economic hierarchy, although in capitalistic countries they like to degrade it. The standard was provisional.

We found quarters in a big old house in the square itself. It was sumptuous but over furnished, inconvenient and in bad taste. It contained everything that could be found in antique shops, from the skull of a fourteenth-century saint to Cuban and Philippine fans of the period of Weyler. In the lower rooms some families who were refugees from the fronts were huddled, half-clad children and mothers with worn faces. I could not pass through them without profound emotion. A poisoned indignation rose to my throat but not from my heart but from the ground itself, to all my body. My grief and indignation came from the earth's darkest depths. And how many times such feelings were to come to me!

We left another library in Montoro and another in El Carpio where our visit coincided with an air raid in which the enemy tried to destroy a tower in the centre of the town, used

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as a defence post against aircraft. Next night the correspondent of *El Socialista* in Montoro invited me to go to see the political commissary of the section, who was working with the chief general. The latter was General Miaja who later on had charge of the defence of Madrid. I was an hour with the commissary, and came away very depressed. He belonged to the Republican Party and had been Governor of Seville. He was extremely pessimistic about the general position. I, who had come from Villafranca and had lived through the fighting on other fronts, could not understand his pessimism. Then I understood that as a former civil governor he had had to struggle with the revolutionary organizations of the workers, and especially with the C.N.T., and now to see the anarchists on an equal footing with the other organizations of the Popular Front produced in him a disillusion and dismay which made him lose faith in everything. That did not prevent him from doing his duty. I was grateful to him, as I took his pessimistic admission as a proof of confidence in me, and also I thought that there was more merit in carrying on responsible duties without belief in victory than when, like me, you possessed it. But still I didn't understand his pessimism and it annoyed me. When I left him I reflected that his case and that of many others was the reverse of the view of the absolute anarchists. The latter trusted blindly to the spontaneous capacity of the masses for rebellion, and had a belief in the coming of the revolution as confident as the belief of Christians in the coming of the Kingdom of God. As so many Spaniards held that belief, it was not surprising that many others, even if firm in liberal and progressive sympathies, and even of socialistic tendencies, saw a danger of decomposition and chaos every time they met workmen with cartridge belts and with rifles on their shoulders. The commissary must have been rather in that state of mind. I believed myself to be at an intermediate point of view. The people in arms produced in me a joy tempered by a serious feeling of responsibility. And that was a feeling widely spread, in the existing state of affairs. Our joy was not excessive, and our sense of responsibility did not fetter our steps. But perhaps I was wrong. The fact is that I left the headquarters, without having spoken to

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anyone except the commissary, in a very depressed state. The worst of pessimism, I thought, is that it is contagious.

But I have never been able to be completely pessimistic. I have sometimes fled from pessimism consciously, although without having recourse to casuistry or sophisms. Without running. Simply shutting my eyes or looking to the other side. Naturally in my case pessimism could kill me. Perhaps not to feel it is sometimes only an unconscious self-defence. But so far this defence has been easy; no heroic measures have been required.

It was very late when I got back to the house. My friends had gone to bed. I entered my room without having recovered from the impression made on me by the commissary. I went straight to bed. When I lighted the bedside lamp I had a surprise. On the pillow, half-covered by the top of the sheet, lay a human skull, shining yellow, with large empty sockets. It was the saints' skull I have already mentioned. No doubt the owners of the house kept it in a glass case and venerated it. Probably that did not prevent them from having compassion for the poor Bushmen when they read about their superstitions in some story of adventure. We had also found parchment documents in a bureau, written in the fifteenth century, giving the history of the poor man, who, it seemed, had been a notable anchorite. My first impression was of repulsion. Then I sat down on the bed and thinking over the commissary's gloomy pessimism, forgot all about the skull. At last I tried to fight against the pessimism and began to undress. The skull was still on the pillow. They had put various objects under the sheets to mimic the shape of a skeleton. It was a good imitation of a skeleton sleeping in my bed. I laughed, thinking of the author of the joke, and guessed who he was, and how I was going to pay him back. Then I began to study the skull. It was brachycephalic, which surprised me, because according to the recent conclusions of the learned, asceticism is more frequent among dolicocephalics. The sutures were perfect, which was also against the man having been one who fled from reality. Well-shaped, well ossified, with the bone spongy in the cavities on the lower surface and in the upper jaw, where the sockets for the teeth were regular.

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I was about to recite Hamlet's soliloquy, which the genius of Shakespeare has made possible for anyone to repeat without shame.

The problem 'To be, or not to be' was solved. We are, and some day we cannot avoid ceasing to be. That is to say, I avoid that conclusion by forming the idea that I am not, that I do not exist. Feeling myself as an illusion. I think, moreover, that I am right. Practice makes that sophism very easy.

But as I wasn't going to let my friend beat me too easily in practical joking I took the skull, rubbed it over carefully with damp phosphorus matches until it was glowing, and then took it to the bedroom next door where my friend had slept the night before. I put it on his pillow half an inch from his face, and then in the darkness fired a shot at the roof.

I went back to my room and put out the light, but almost at once heard desperate screams. I ran back to the other bedroom and saw in the bed not my friend but a pretty girl of less than twenty years, blonde, delicate, quite charming. With great blue eyes starting, she was staring at the skull. I picked it up by the empty eye-socket and threw it out of the open balcony window. The poor anchorite crashed on the tiles of the courtyard. I wished to take the place it had occupied, and the girl, who continued to weep, appeared not to notice the substitution. Then she became fond of me, with an affection that was partly metaphysical, and came with us to Madrid. But one day she went off again, and I have not seen her since.

CHAPTER XI

LIEUTENANT P.

I made the acquaintance of Lieutenant P. of the Artillery in the sierra one night when I was about to go to bed. Nearly all the patrol were out on duty. Those who had stayed behind were asleep after a very hard day. I also was going to bed, the first time for several days. It was midnight. Suddenly a powerful young man came in, with a sporting appearance, very dark in complexion, with gauze on his temple under the ear-piece of his tortoise-shell glasses. We introduced ourselves. Then he asked me if there was anything to eat. We searched the kitchen and found coffee and milk, eggs, and a stew of vegetables. We were looking for oil, and by mistake put paraffin into the frying-pan so that we had to clean it before cooking the eggs. Lieutenant P. showed some familiarity with the implements of the kitchen. Meantime we chatted.

‘Where is your battery?’ I asked him.

‘Packed up at the Guadarrama cross-road. We are going to Peguerinos to-night.’

He was in charge of a mountain battery with which he had done good work in Guadarrama. The patrol had worked with him several times and P. was enthusiastic about it.

‘Yesterday they ate up my guns over there, in Valdelesierra. We were done for. But for you we should all have been in the soup.’

He told me that the civil guards and the Company of Steel who were in front of him had deserted him.

‘That battalion of steel’, he said, but without any venom, ‘would be better called a battalion of straw.’

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I saw that it was not a considered verdict, and that he said it simply because he didn't like the name of the battalion, thinking it too romantic. Lieutenant P. was a complete realist. His moral balance and his clarity of judgment were in accord with his superb physical health. Besides the soldiers who were the complement of his battery, he had with him two or three militiamen who had done their army service in the artillery. One of these, Peña, was already more than forty years old. He was a master-mason and could not read. As that was a disgraceful exception among the Madrid workers, they constantly threw it in his face. Peña told us that he had tried to learn, but could not do so, for the anxiety to be able to read went to his head and made it muzzy. 'The more you tease me', he concluded, 'the worse it is.' I hadn't seen him that night, as he was walking about in the passages and going in and coming out of the dormitories. We heard him talking in a low tone to one of those who were asleep and then coming out grumbling. P. called to him:

'What are you doing there, Peña?'

He appeared with a determined air, ready to explode indignantly. In his horny mason's hand he held a red silk ribbon. P. pretended to be angry:

'Always on the prowl! You old he-goat!'

Peña protested:

'Poor sort of soldiers these! Not one of them with a needle and thread.'

He disappeared again in the passages. The lieutenant sat down to table and I waited on him. Always the one who had eaten waited on whoever came to eat. Meanwhile P. kept talking:

'I don't know what the staff in Madrid is thinking about. Incredible things happen. The other morning we had been helping to put in position a 15.5 battery. It could have been emplaced by night, but they waited to do it until nine in the morning. The battery would have done its work better three miles behind where we were, but someone ordered it to be put two miles in front, well within rifle range of the enemy. What was bound to happen happened. The guns had just been taken out of the lorries and dragged from the Collado

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road to be mounted on a small level close to the road, not more than ten or eleven yards from it, another great folly, because it began to attract fire from the enemy guns which interfered with our moving the pieces, as they began to rain heavy shells on us. My patrol was at work with picks and planks. A militia girl of about eighteen years old had joined herself to us. The explosions of the enemies' shells kept us from working in peace. At last one fell plumb on a gun, which it turned into a heap of scrap. Another on the munition lorry, and that was blown into the air in pieces. When we saw that, we began to retire and tried to reach the staff to get them to save the three remaining guns. When we were out on the road the girl began to shout:

“Don't be cowards, comrades! Don't abandon the guns.”

The soldiers of the battery took shelter in a trench. We kept throwing ourselves down whenever a shell arrived. We did it as well as a good goalkeeper. We all had our knees and arms torn. We threw ourselves down several times a minute. And when one shell burst, we got up and began working before the next one came. Sometimes, by the sound of the shell, we knew that it was going forty or fifty yards behind us, and we only shrank a little. Other times the lower tone told us that the shell was going to fall on us. We threw ourselves on the ground and the explosion took place alongside us, some one always threw a lump of earth rather violently at the neck of the comrade alongside. The fright of the one who received the blow was very different according to the character. The person whom it affected most was Vicente, a comrade who never hid his fears, but all the same went everywhere and did his duty like anyone else.

We tried to persuade the militia girl that we could do nothing there, and that it was necessary to withdraw the undamaged guns. She insisted on staying on foot at the side of one of them. We ordered her to follow us; she refused, and we had hardly gone twenty yards when a shell killed her. Her clothes and her hair were burning. Her virginal breast and her abdomen were exposed. Under the strong light of July, her flesh had the smooth whiteness of marble. We went back to lift her, and we put her inside the nearest lorry. She was

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wounded on the head, the temples, and the side. Even the hair on her body was burning. We left her in the lorry and went up to the commander's quarters to get orders about the battery.'

Lieutenant P. was well-informed, and in a high state of indignation. He doubled up one of the fried eggs and thrust it into his mouth, and then remarked:

'I prefer not to think about what I am seeing. I don't want to embitter my life. Even for the few days still left to us.' Then he proposed: 'Why don't you come with me to Peguerinos?'

He wished us to keep with his guns. I told him that I should have to consult the patrol.

'As for me, I shall be delighted.'

The lieutenant tried to induce us by telling us how much there would be to do there.

'Besides,' he told me, 'I am taking with me a second lieutenant whom you know.'

It was a son of Don Angel Ossorio, the famous liberal politician. Lieutenant P. drank his coffee hurriedly. Then we heard Peña's voice from the bedroom of the comrade who did our cooking, a sister of Vicente. The girl was protesting and laughing. We called Peña. I went to the room and found him sitting on the girl's bed. The girl was sewing on the front of his shirt a nice bow she had made from the red ribbon. When she had finished, she kicked him through the sheet and Peña went out stumbling.

'He has a cheek', she protested, 'to wake me up for that.'

The lieutenant told me that Peña had made a nuisance of himself for three days with his little bit of silk. In the trenches, in the battery, everywhere he kept asking for a sewing-needle.

Peña went out stroking the red bow and saying to the lieutenant:

'I wouldn't change this for your stars or for the badges of a general.'

He also took a cup of coffee, and then the two went off. The lieutenant was carrying a hand machine-gun. Peña had an American rifle with a magazine of eighteen uncased lead bullets. I thought that the weapon was modern, but the

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lieutenant said it wasn't. It was a weapon used long ago by 'Pernales', an Andalucian bandit of the end of last century.

As they were going out, the lieutenant told me:

'You may as well know. To-morrow I shall be with my guns in Cabeza Lijar.'

As soon as he had mentioned the name of the position, he looked all round him as if he feared that he had been imprudent. Then they went off. There was no moon. The night was very dark. After the heat of the day, the chill closed the pores of the skin, but was a tonic in the lungs. I went out on the little terrace with them, and after they left stayed behind to smoke a cigarette. I was going to sit down on a cane chair and found myself on someone's knees. I got up and by the light of a match saw a young man not in the militia uniform but in that of a soldier. I had seen him before, but couldn't think where.

'Who are you?'

He looked at me with an expression partly stupid and partly self-satisfied.

'You forget comrades quickly, I know who you are.'

He continued to smile. He betrayed his mean personality in that smile, which was not open. He added:

'They call me the "Negus".'

'Why?'

'Because during the Abyssinian affair I was always talking about the Negus in the barracks.'

It was dark, and the light of my cigarette as I puffed it threw a red glow on my face and on the buttons of the uniform and the cornea of the eyes of the 'Negus'. The man let his words fall nonchalantly. By the same light I noticed that his forehead was narrow and his hair closely cropped. In his eyes was a self-satisfied melancholy.

'You are a queer creature, "Negus".'

'Yes,' he agreed pleasantly. 'I see that all of you think me queer.'

'What is your unit?'

'I am a soldier of the line, in the first infantry regiment. But I am on leave.'

I didn't understand that. Was he going to pass his leave at

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the front? If it wasn't actually the front here, certainly we were within the enemy's zone of fire, and its shells were falling behind our house.

'I see that you all wonder at finding me here?'

'You have said it! But anyhow, watch your step!'

'It is no use taking care. I know that I am not going to be one of those who will see the end of this war.'

'Why?'

'You will kill me.'

I began to laugh, as I didn't see anything else I could do. I saw that my laugh cleared up the situation quite sufficiently. It gave it a more innocent air. He added:

'You or the others. But something is going to happen to me soon.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because I am fed up with everything. I don't care what happens. I wouldn't move my little finger to save anyone. And besides I've had warnings.'

That was more interesting. I puffed my cigarette. I saw the 'Negus' sitting upright with his elbows on the arms of the cane chair, his hands clasped with the false humility of a priest, his stubborn head sunk between his shoulders, low on his chest.

'What warnings?' I asked him.

'Three days ago I dreamt about a spaniel. And so to-night I don't want to go to bed. I shall go to Madrid within the next half hour.'

'How are you going?'

'In one of the ambulances.'

'Have you a safe-conduct?'

'Yes. I have a pass from the Ministry of War valid for all the fronts.'

'You? A common soldier?'

He shrugged his shoulders. I knew that because of the creaking of the chair. Above the distant noise of the machine-guns one heard every now and then the explosion of a shell. The 'Negus' turned up in the most unexpected places in an inexplicable way. He knew the names of the chiefs of all the sectors, and sometimes predicted the relief and changing of the staff. And also he always disappeared unexpectedly.

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'I have powerful friends. Since I was a small boy I have been in religious colleges and I have very important protectors. Until now I haven't been able to do anything, because I am a little weak in the head. That is why they have given me sick leave.'

We were silent. After a few minutes he went on:

'I could go about quite freely on the other side,' and he pointed towards the enemy. 'More freely than here.'

I didn't reply. I waited to see where he would stop if he were left alone. After another pause he asked:

'A good chance to do something big, don't you think?' And without waiting for me to reply, he went on: 'Something big without too much trouble. A resolute man could make good once for all. By killing Mola, for example. What do you think? Wouldn't that be a good stroke?'

Mola was the commanding general on the opposite side in that sector.

'Just think of it!'

'But it would be more difficult for others to get to Mola than for me. The worst would be to escape afterwards.'

I asked him if amongst his other good relations he knew 'S. S.' He was a former anarchist leader who went over to the fascists and finally became secretary-general of a supposed fascist-syndicalist organization. The 'Negus' smiled.

'I know why you ask! I know S. And also Rivagorda.'

As he associated these names it was plain that 'Negus' knew a great deal. But he was only half informed. He thought that Rivagorda—an agent-provocateur and terrorist of the fascist organizations—was a revolutionary. The 'Negus' thought his acquaintance with these kind of people would be a recommendation to us. He was dangerous for two reasons. As things were, he could be used by anyone against us. That was assuming his honesty. But even more because although he tried to pass himself off as a fool, he was much less so than he pretended. His persistence in talking to us about his mental weakness might be an abnormal want of self-confidence, but it might also be a trick to make us believe him irresponsible. In any case he needed watching. I was anxious lest he had heard Lieutenant P. when he was saying where the bat-

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tery was going to be placed. To see if he knew, I told him that I had forgotten the name of the position, and so could not tell it to my comrades. The 'Negus' immediately reminded me that it was Cabeza Lijar, a little way in front of the camp at Peguerinos. I was surprised and alarmed.

When my comrades arrived I told them that the 'Negus' had been there. I refrained from saying anything more because I was afraid to throw suspicion on him. The mere suspicion of treachery would have destroyed him in a few hours, because there was nothing about him to dispel a suggestion of that kind. He seemed soft, half-baked, chaotic. There was nothing in him to help him even if he were innocent. The presence of Gascó, a militiaman who belonged to another group and who had shot two spies with real enjoyment, made me still more prudent. Gascó was neither socialist nor communist nor anarchist. He worked in the sewers of Madrid, and enrolled himself in the militia as soon as the insurrection began. He was short, strong-boned and had broad hairy hands. His hair was cropped and he wore a khaki-coloured hat, always with a chin-strap. All that gave him the appearance of an American soldier. He was a heavy drinker, but was never drunk. Alcohol and the mountain air had given him a high colour extending even to his large ears, which stuck out from his head. He was always chattering. He had the cruelty of a child. He had suffered so many humiliations and privations in his life that there was a kind of logic in his wish to finish off a pretended beggar in whose bag of rubbish we found drawings with the positions of our batteries and our petrol tanks. He served in the same way another man who was walking in white trousers by the side of a donkey on which two little boys were seated gracefully. Under the boys were a heliograph and a Morse code. When the two spies had been condemned by court-martial, Gascó took them over and afterwards came in a state of indignation to protest because the Red Cross men who had come to remove the bodies had said that they were still alive. He gave us details and we made him be quiet, sick at heart at hearing him talk of the execution with the vanity of one who had done his work well. If I had raised the smallest suspicion against the

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'Negus' I should have created an atmosphere that would have been the end of him. I noticed, however, that they were all suspicious about him. Ricardo, the chief, a young doctor, extremely corpulent, with broad shoulders and a short Roman head, hurriedly said that the 'Negus' was a queer fish.

It was a bad lookout for him. What we said everyone who knew him would say, and something would certainly happen to cause the 'Negus' to be arrested and sentenced as a spy, because our camp was plagued with spying, and these conjectures happened too often. The patrol was under the Guadarrama staff, but had some independent authority. We had a meeting and discussed Lieutenant P.'s proposal. We all agreed to go, and fixed the evening of next day for starting. Ricardo, the chief, tore his hair when he spoke of the general in command at Guadarrama.

'He has no sense,' he declared. 'He thinks that a general's duty is to stroll among the bullets saying, "This is nothing".'

He turned to me:

'You don't think it is possible to stay in the garden of the General Staff, if only the time to smoke a cigarette?'

In those days that garden was swept by the enemy's machine-guns. And General R. did nothing more practical than to stay there repeating that 'nothing was happening'. Thanks to the Company of Steel, and the officers of the General Staff, it was possible to fix the lines, locate and keep back the enemy. But the General R. thought that his duty was carried out by making a display of indifference in the garden where the bullets were whistling in all directions. Fortunately he was soon recalled.

We slept and next day set out for Peguerinos in two cars each with seats for seven. We had to go up to Guadarrama and then turn to the left in the direction of the Escorial, from where we went on to Peguerinos by a zig-zag road which crossed the pass over the sierra of Avila. The cars came from the depot at Villalba, and one of them was a noble Rolls-Royce, without a horn, without glass either in the windscreen or in the windows, and of a very old registration. All over it displayed the effects of machine-gun fire. The driver, a young man with the air of the hero of an American film, was a

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communist, and very proud of his car, at which they had already shot with mortars, machine-guns, rifles, light guns and even bombing and chasing aeroplanes. And yet there was the car with its age and its wounds, running imperturbably. Representatives of all the political tendencies were on the patrol. We had come together casually from affinity of character, and we were a living proof of the effectiveness of the Popular Front. A young Galician represented the Left republicans, four were communists, two were anarcho-syndicalists, and I and the driver of the second car belonged to none of the parties. Representatives of a certain Governmental group were absent, but nevertheless amongst us we embraced its spirit and its ideology.

We passed close to the abandoned battery. They had not yet withdrawn it since the day before. Our cars moved rapidly, especially over the last part of our course upon which hundreds of shells fell every day. When we reached Guadarrama we turned to the left, taking the Escorial road. In these days nearly the first mile of that road was under fire from the enemy machine-guns, but they were a long way off. The poplars were the victims, and the road was carpeted with their leaves and tender shoots. Above them our guns and those of the enemy exchanged volleys. Our car stopped apparently without cause alongside another car destroyed by an explosion. The driver jumped down, routed in the destroyed motor in search of a valve which was missing in our car, and came back with it. The shells kept passing over our heads. We continued our journey. We hoped to reach Peguerinos within an hour, but we had to turn back at the Escorial. The staff of the militia of Collado called us on the telephone and the guards controlling the road gave us the order. We returned. Two days later we went to the Escorial again, and then on to Peguerinos. We arrived before noon. There was only a small force in the town. Hardly a company of assault guards and some auxiliary services, service-corps and sanitary men. We called up the encampment on the mayor's telephone. A foreign comrade answered; he recognized my name (my forgotten name of civil life). He told us that he could put us in communication with P.'s battery, to

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whom we spoke. The lieutenant wished us to come at once and invited us to dinner, but the foreigner of the encampment intervened and said that we must be his guests.

'They will be tired when they arrive,' he said to P., 'for the road is long and uphill. Let them eat with me and afterwards go up to the battery.'

It was a five miles' stretch to the encampment along a terrible road. Half of us went on foot and the others in the second car, which had a higher chassis. But they had to go so slowly that we arrived before them. We were marching fully equipped and the sun fell on us like lead. At first the road was terrible. When we did arrive our very bones were burning and we could not have walked many miles farther.

The comrade with whom we had spoken was a Yugoslav of fair complexion and white hair, and had become chestnut coloured from the dust and sun. He received us in a shed of pine branches which was the telephone exchange, the headquarters, the paymaster's office and the stores. All the arrangements for the camp passed through his hands. It was enough to exchange a couple of words with him to see that he was a man of culture, of practical sense, and of experience of campaigning life such as one finds only in an English explorer. He told us that all the positions dependent on the camp had the telephone running to them, as he had installed it himself, and that P.'s battery had been put in position at three o'clock. Among other forces, there were in the encampment two companies of aviation and the battalion commanded by Fernando de Rosa.

Contrary to what I thought at first, Turkovich, for that was the foreigner's name, was not a communist, but a liberal idealist of middle-class origin. He was partly a romantic, like the anarchists of the first Spanish phase (1868). Conversation with him was very interesting. He spoke softly and with great courtesy. That courtesy sometimes disconcerted the militia who came to him making demands rather violently. Then Turkovich would stand up (he was a very small man) and reply without losing his calmness.

'I know you very well, comrade. It was you who carried off a leg of beef yesterday, and don't say it wasn't for here is

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the card (and he took the card from a file), and if you have thrown the bones into the river, I am not going to give you more to make the company's soup. That will teach you to save the bones another time.'

The militiaman went off fuming. I noticed that everyone liked Turkovich, the dispensing brother of the encampment. He had no military command, but all the difficulties of the camp came to him. He struggled with everyone and against everyone without effort, almost as a routine. Sometimes he used low-class Spanish phrases which sounded quaintly in his foreign accent.

'Do you take me for your father?' he would reply to an obstinately tiresome quartermaster.

Or again:

'I am fed up with you rascals.'

That amused the militia, who went off shaking their heads and murmuring with smiles:

'What a blighter Turkovich is!'

We talked for more than an hour. We were both delighted to spend so much time without exercising the bad practice of analysis.

'What is your impression about all this?' he said to me, referring to the sum total of events, and added, without waiting for a reply:

'It is the same with you as with me. It hits one in the face. We are as happy as families at a childbirth. It is simple and beautiful. What a lesson to the world! Unhappy those who do not see clear in this war!'

Then he went on:

'A great destiny for a great people. From here we are stirring the conscience of all the citizens of the world.'

That seemed to me very romantic.

'It will be enough for us', I said, 'to secure by arms the authority we gained before, by clean argument.'

We agreed that at present the future of the dignity of man, the future of culture and progress were at stake. It was life rising in rebellion against superstitions and denials, to re-assert itself. And how largely generous it all was!

Turkovich had rather a mystic belief in man. Perhaps I

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have it also, but however that may be, it is the only mysticism which seems to be an affirmation and not an evasion. Even if it is an inconclusive affirmation.

We spoke about international politics and agreed that Italy and Germany would intervene at once. Not only sending technicians but regular armies. But according to Turkovich that would be the beginning of the end for Hitler and Mussolini.

I pointed out to him that such intervention would be an enormous danger for us, but he smiled and shook his head. 'The Spanish people has too much at stake in this war to let itself be beaten.'

The comrade's judgment was curious. He thought that the fourteen thousand murders committed by Franco in Navarre, the thirty thousand shot in Badajoz, the twenty-seven thousand in Granada must lead inevitably to the collapse of the rebels. They seemed to him terrible but only episodes, and he saw in them the absolute promise of our victory. He expected and relied on the spontaneous play of popular reaction. For the rest—armaments, good leaders and so forth—seemed to him as secondary, and he treated them as accidents of a problem which in reality depended on the thirst of the people for vengeance.

Turkovich regarded me as a communist and put the problems before me so as to raise the opposite of what he thought I believed. In his opinion there were many partly psychological factors of greater weight than the economic ones. He agreed that these factors were an inseparable part of the whole question, but he said that the centuries of moulding—nationalistic, individualistic, religious—which capitalism had found how to exacerbate recently, were difficult to overcome. Like some French intellectuals, he believed in 'psychological constants', not of race but of peoples. These 'constants' made the force of inertia which resisted with increasing strength communistic propaganda, and which had determined the fascist phenomena in Italy and Germany. In Turkovich's opinion these 'constants' were German patriotism, the religious and mystical spirit, the thirst for idealism, the educational and social environment, including pride of race, not of caste.

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'It is incredible', Turkovich maintained, 'that the communists, usually so acute, have not taken these into account.' He thought that all these 'constants' were compatible with socialism. There was also the possibility that socialism could come about more easily in a federation of proletarian states than in bourgeois capitalistic unities isolated by fascism.

'In the world as it is to-day', he added, 'you cannot bring about a mental disposition chemically pure, by rigid formulae. The leaders of a party must manipulate the impurities of the masses and reform them with similarly mixed ideas. In a fashion it was the biological problem of Pasteur.'

A communist comrade, belonging to a Madrid committee, who was in our patrol, said to me, digging his elbow into my side:

'When two intellectuals get together, then we get off the track altogether.'

'Wait,' I replied, laughing, 'I am only listening.'

Turkovich went on:

'I have often seen in the mentality of Spanish communism a too simple and rigid policy. And to-day, in policy as in the arts and sciences (but especially in the art of war), an architectonic spirit, a spirit of the three dimensions is indispensable.'

I was half in agreement with him.

'And how about the fourth dimension,' I said to him; 'we must remember that.'

'Yes, yes,' he hastened to reply. 'But that is the work of genius. If the fourth dimension be attained, it will be through not only a good technician but a creator. The case of Lenin.'

My comrades were listening, but perhaps they did not understand. And after all I was closer to them than to Turkovich. Although I am nothing if not an intellectual, I have tried to forget my reading and the effects of culture, and sometimes have managed to reach a point of perfection which in my view is that in which my thought is influenced by nothing but instinctive, natural and simple facts; but intellectual theories often pursue me, and when they take me by surprise, try to impose themselves on material reality and undo it.

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Two enemy scouting aeroplanes came over us and dropped some printed proclamations. The soldiers picked them up, and read them in little groups, laughing. Franco had signed them and promised to respect all their lives if they surrendered. The soldiers quoted a Portuguese saying: 'If you pull me out of the well, I'll spare your life.'

Turkovich looked at the sky suspiciously. When we saw that they were throwing out proclamations, we thought that they would not throw bombs.

Fernando de Rosa arrived in his blue mono, small, almost like a child, his hair uncovered to the air. He commanded a battalion and it was understood that in a fashion he commanded the whole encampment. He had neither a revolver nor a belt. Only a thick branch of fir, as a stick. Smiling, he showed me the cudgel and said:

'This is excellent against aeroplanes.'

CHAPTER XII

CABEZA LIJAR

The bad road from Peguerinos ended at the camp itself. The valley was closed at the elevation of about 4,000 feet at the foot of some very high mountain peaks which enclosed it to the north and east. Lieutenant P.'s position was between two of these peaks. Turkovich told us: 'You have only to follow the telephone wire. That will lead you directly to the battery.'

We walked about two miles through pines and low scrub. P.'s guns had been carried in pieces on the backs of mountain mules accustomed to walk between precipices. When we reached the battery, we found Lieutenant P. and his sergeants. The captain of the battery was in the encampment and the other officer in Madrid on leave. P. was staying at the front of the battery, which was placed a little behind the flank of the mountain, from which San Rafael and Alto de Leon could be seen. The position was critical. From that flank the opposite side of Guadarrama could be seen, and we enfiladed the enemy positions from the side and slightly from behind, and much higher up. The strategical importance of the position was very great. Lieutenant P. received us with an opened bottle of brandy, and said, before greeting us: 'I suppose you are going to stay here, with me, aren't you?'

The guns were posted at a short distance from each other under leafy pines, and were camouflaged with green branches. Under them the dull steel appeared, and the shining copper glistened in the green shadow of the trees. About a hundred yards behind them, the limbers were ranged, also covered

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with branches. Still farther back the mules were tied up in a circle half-hidden by the trees. The soldiers, about a hundred in number, had made shelters of branches and could disappear from sight in a few seconds. All was arranged in the simple and natural order of war.

We leaned out from cover with Lieutenant P., who showed us the enemy positions. In the last few days ten heavy guns had been spotted. P. said to us with enthusiasm: 'With fifty shots we can blow them to pieces.'

We ourselves could see only three or four guns. P. was well contented with his work—three days and three nights of observation. I incited him:

'We are going for them, P.?'

The lieutenant gave a blow with his fist on his knee which was bent over the twisted stem of an oak.

'It is a dirty trick! We are not allowed to fire.'

'But why?'

'For four days the enemy has been sprinkling our lines at Guadarrama, firing from over there. Four days with our nerves on edge. And that telephone, cursed be the day when they installed it, keeps repeating from Peguerinos, from the Escorial, and from Madrid itself, always the same. "Don't fire! Don't open fire without express orders."'

We saw their positions within reach. What a surprise, what a shock for the fascists to find themselves attacked from behind. Down below, to the left, I saw my house. I wished I could have gone down to it. I went to find Bodín, my brave comrade.

'Shall we go down?' I invited him.

Bodín jumped to my side and put down his rifle. But it would have been worse than mad, it would have been stupid. We saw passing along the road long files of fascist provisioning lorries. How our hearts ached at not being able to fire our guns! Bodín grumbled:

'There are still traitors in the Ministry of War. I think I must have a look round there.'

I suggested opening fire and telling the staff afterwards that we had been attacked, but P. replied that in war it was necessary to obey. We wearied ourselves discussing the loyalty of

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the staff. It was certainly possible that our orders were in relation to some wise plan of the General Staff. I looked at the little encampment. All was well hidden and in order. The comrades who came and went from their little huts of branches had an air of Robinson Crusoe. The sergeant on duty went about with a beard several days old, without leggings, with his legs scratched by thistles, and the hair on his chest showing through his open shirt. The lieutenant told us that the 'Negus' had been there two days ago.

'A suspicious type,' he added. 'He comes and we don't know why. He says everywhere that he is weak in the head, and he sees everything, pries into everything, informs himself about everything. If you see him, tell him to keep out of my way because I am tempted to have a shot at him.'

We all were upset by that information. We told P. that two scouting aeroplanes had flown over the camp.

'Enemy ones?'

'Yes.'

'They must have been the aeroplanes that I heard two hours ago.'

He had not seen them because the mountain shut off the sky towards the south. P. was glad not to have seen them, as that meant that they could not have seen him. A few minutes later we heard the distant drone of aeroplanes.

'Can they be ours?'

They came from the direction of the fascist camp. We waited anxiously for a few seconds, when we saw over one of the peaks, but moving well away from us, five bombing trimotors in a formation like the head of an arrow. Then, much higher up, four 'chasers'. The trimotors were black, German. Without doubt they were enemy planes. They advanced slowly, confidently, solemnly. The fifteen engines caused vibrations in the blue arch of the sky in which they reverberated as in the diaphragm of a telephone.

The lieutenant shouted all round:

'Lie down! Keep quiet! No one must move.'

Apparently they were going towards the camp. I was trembling for Fernando de Rosa's brave lads, and for the whole encampment, so well organized, but without better

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defence against aeroplanes than the stick Fernando had shown me. The aeroplanes, on reaching the debouchment of the watercourse into our valley, turned at right angles and came steadily, resolutely, over us. They followed the line of the watercourse (at the top of which we were). With our bellies towards the ground, and our rifles under us so that no glitter of metal might be visible, we waited. The aeroplanes gave a devastating impression of their security, force, power. They arrived. On whom would fall the chance in the lottery of death? They were now over us. We held our breath. I noticed that P. who had been on his feet, had thrown himself on the ground violently. At once the mountain seemed to heave under us. Maelstroms of earth and smoke rose up around us. Another explosion, loud and dry. Then a short chain of explosions, and the blast of the explosive wave in our ears and our open mouths. I felt something warm and wet on my forehead. The motors kept sounding above us. They circled, turned, and came over us again. A second set of bombs fell over the first. Down below we heard the wounded mules. Each plane dropped four or five bombs simultaneously. The first series was of about twenty. We remained deafened, covered with soil, enveloped in smoke. I saw the five trimotors begin to wheel so as to come over us again. Their engines vibrated in the marrow of our bones. 'Now this is the end,' we thought. 'They have discovered us and intend to exterminate us.' There was nothing for it but to await our death. The dust and smoke were disappearing. There were groans near. I found that on my forehead there were blood and brains which were not mine, as I had felt no shock. The aeroplanes came back once again. Lieutenant P. rose up from my side and stood erect. His forehead, also, was stained with blood. Down below, the mules kept screaming.

'Comrades!' he shouted, 'We have no anti-aircraft machine-guns, we have no arms against the death which is coming over us again, but we have something to offer the Republic and our country. We have our lives. Artillery men! Get the first, second, third and fourth guns ready.'

All ran to their posts. The lieutenant ordered:

'Steady!'

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We also rose up. Bodín began to sing the 'International'. The five trimotors droned above us. The blue arch of the sky once more vibrated. The bombs fell again. The sierra shook under the convulsion. Through the smoke and dust I saw Bodín stagger and fall. The lieutenant shouted out:

'Long live the people's Spain! Long live the everlasting Spain!'

We awaited the aeroplanes once more. We were sure that they would keep returning whilst any one of us was still alive. But perhaps they had discharged all their load, and they did not return. We hurried to help the wounded. At first the impression was horrifying. The ground was strewn with bloody fragments. Twenty-three mules and horses had been blown to pieces. A scarlet and purple snake hung from a tree; it was a piece of gut. Of our patrol, Bodín was wounded in the leg. Two soldiers had been killed. Six were wounded, of whom one died in the litter whilst he was being carried away.

The telephone was still intact. We called up the encampment and asked for litters and orderlies. Then the lieutenant took up the mouthpiece and spoke to the command. When he left the telephone he said dejectedly:

'You know that we have been discovered and are defenceless against aeroplanes—and still they won't let us fire!'

It was urgent to change the position of the battery, but if we did not wish to waste our time, it was necessary to wait until it was dark. Meantime Vicente, who was livid, called me aside, and gesticulating with his usual vivacity, tried to throw off his fright by protests:

'Don't tell me that they have any right to ask this of any man. They can demand that we risk our lives in the battle. Good! I am the first to do it. But for them to keep us waiting here until the enemy hits us the second time, if not at the first, without our being able to fire at the enemy, that is not to be required from anyone. Why are the guns not firing? Because there is someone in the Ministry of War helping Franco? Have we not the strength and the right to shoot every traitor who gets in our way? Or are we to go on treating them with such delicacy, while they are killing the families of our brothers? I tell you we are not acting like men. Are the

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traitors in the Ministries being protected by the Popular Front? Then to the devil with the Popular Front! Whilst we are here exposing our lives to the shells, unable to do anything but bite the bark from the trees like mad dogs, there are sons of bitches in the higher commands selling us every moment.'

It was growing dark. The ambulance men came. Ricardo had given first aid to Bodín, whose wound was not very serious. No bone seemed to have been touched. The metal had carried off a lump of flesh from the soft part of the leg. Bodín refused to be removed. We had to compel him, and he went off singing 'The Young Soldier'. Of the other wounded men, one had a big opening in the side and died in the litter, and another had a fractured hip and the femoral artery cut; he died also shortly before reaching the camp.

We got ready to drag away the guns. It was quite dark and we began to roll them under the trees. As there were no unwounded horses or mules, we had to do it by putting our shoulders to the wheels and dragging them by ropes. There was not a yard of level ground. To move guns over ground only fit for goats and Alpine climbers was full of difficulties. One of the guns slipped back in the dark. To keep it from rolling backwards into the abyss, three or four went behind it and stopped it with their shoulders. The hand of one man was caught between a boulder and the end of the protective plating, and four fingers were cut off. We did our best to give him aid, but it was a kind of veterinary treatment, and all night his groans were mingled with the cries of the wounded horses.

By dawn the guns were re-emplaced on the west side of Cabeza Lijar. The position was again very good. Some of us wished to sleep, but it was necessary to post guards as there was a low mist and we could not see three steps ahead. Vicente kept muttering to himself, in a kind of daze:

'Can they really demand all this from a man?'

I told him to remember that what the enemy wished to do was to demoralize us, to make us react just as he was doing. That idea restrained him. Those who were not on duty threw themselves on the ground, wrapping up their heads in their

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coats. It was August but the cold was wintry with a wind that was icy. The lieutenant opened his last two bottles of brandy, but although our stomachs were empty, the effects of the spirit didn't last long. Very soon we heard the engines of the enemy aeroplanes over us again.

This time we did not see the planes. They were flying above the fog, perhaps bathed in the pleasant sunlight of the heights. Vicente sniffed in the fog, trying to ascertain the direction of the menace, but the motors were droning not in one direction but in several.

'They aren't bombers,' someone said, 'they are scouting.' High up, machine-guns were heard. The sleepers started up. 'They are fighting with "chasers" of ours,' another said.

The idea that one of the aeroplanes was ours cheered us more than the brandy. Our skin was the colour of bone, and the cuticle, burned by the sun, which usually gave us a healthy appearance, made us look dirty. The cold was shrivelling us. We had to take care when we put a foot on the ground as ice-crystals pricked us. The food-store had been destroyed the day before by a shell, but someone gathered up a little coffee mixed with earth and leaves from the trees. We began to kindle a fire, but had to stop, because the aeroplanes were droning nearer to us and any sign might betray us through the fog. On the other side of Cabeza Lijar, in the place where we had been, we could hear the explosions of bombs from the aeroplanes. Either the German pilots were crazy or thought us so, or they could not have thought that we were still there.

Before long the aeroplanes were over us again, and we could hear the machine-guns. We heard bullets passing. They came hot out of the fog and snarled over our heads. Some of them plopped on the ground not far from us. They came more quickly than the sound, and they had already passed when we heard the 'tacatata' of the machine-guns. The motors hummed in every direction and it was useless to try to take protection behind a tree-trunk, as we might only be exposing ourselves more. In a few minutes things got much worse. The enemy had got indications of our new position, and

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swept it carefully with machine-guns. Vicente growled between his teeth:

'It is enough to drive one mad. I prefer the bombs.'

How small we felt getting! It was useless to make ready a rifle, to pick up a hand grenade. We kept silent and waited, we didn't know for what. Was the war always going to be like that? To put ourselves all in a row and go on waiting until our turn to die should come? Seated against the pines and sure that we could do nothing, we thought almost aloud. The rough and almost veterinary treatment of the wounded and their slow evacuation towards Peguerinos horrified me, but I thought, and I am sure it was the hope of all my comrades, that our bullet would hit us in the head or the heart. The mist, which seemed to be protecting us, really added a refinement to our torture: mystery. Our fear was a fear already filled with calm conclusions, fossilized beyond all possible reflections. Sometimes we wished to shriek, not in protest but as a justification. We wished to fight against men. Let them bring men to us. Perhaps there would not be men enough for us. But not against machines.

When Don Quijote said to Sancho that he did not wish arquebuses or pistols as these were vile weapons which in the hands of a weakling could kill a strong man at a distance, he spoke a truth which often afflicted us in the early months of the war. The machine sought us from the white clouds and discharged its metal with impunity. The body could reinforce itself with another courage, that of the spirit; but it served us only to die. The moral fortitude which we opposed so many times to the bombs, did not stop the bombs. It only let us await them valiantly and offer them our breasts. But our moral fortitude is made for life in triumph. We wish to live and to conquer. A dim voice tells us that we may conquer even by dying. The Spanish people, shedding its blood drop by drop, is constructing a gigantic truth. For some consciences slow in perception a truth of that nature may be necessary.

All this monstrous sacrifice, so speaks the voice of the millennium, is necessary to save men and societies whose imagination has not yet been awakened!

And we continued time after time to be under the shining

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and winged bomb, with its bright girdle of copper, with its smack like a closed 'a', its metallic smack. What a joy to feel oneself strong within the animal body which feels the same fear as the wounded earth, the rocks and the trees. Within our marvellous body, which is unwilling to lose its harmony of organized lime and tissues and humours, which was loved and wishes to love again, which has drunk water and wishes to drink it again, which has hated foolishly and wishes to hate again. What a joy to be conscious of the generous soul, and to walk, walk onwards, with courage and longing for immortality in our obedient feet. In moments of despair a stimulating memory came from other moments like those, passed and passed through in dread. And when what was happening was choking us too closely, I thought: 'If I survive, the day may be very close on which during hours of dull peace, days that are poisoned and worthless, I shall regret not having been killed to-day.' It was a good reflection under the mist which enveloped us in the steel-laden air. Amongst other things it served to keep my wrist from trembling as I poured iodine from a bottle into a deep wound which a bullet had opened in a comrade's shoulder.

For the first time I saw on the lieutenant's forehead the fixed and almost forbidding seal placed by the persistence of an insuperable peril. He went to the telephone—we were twenty minutes away from our former position—to see if they would now allow us to open fire. As we had heard explosions quite close, we did not let him go alone, and I went with him.

Close to one of the shelters of branches which had been abandoned near the telephone, there was a dead comrade. He had not been removed the day before because it was dark, and there was little enough time to take away the wounded. I sat down at his side while the lieutenant was speaking, and gazed at him. Our dead are not repugnant. He had fallen on his face, and his twitching hands had scraped the ground. With the nails and the fingers he had gathered up earth in his frenzy. His eyes were open, and their last look had been for that soil of Spain which he held in his hands. The country earth too must have gazed at the corner of the dead man's eyes, white as the clouds which it usually saw. The dead man



A Shelter

CABEZA LIJAR

had an expression of frenzy, a clutching gesture, as if instead of earth he held in his hands the young breast of his betrothed.

'Take with you the soil of Spain in your clasp, comrade! It is your glory. That soil is for you. You have given it your life, but it too is yours for ever. It will be yours in the grave but also in the future and in history. In the face of your divine rights to the land, of what avail are Franco's filthy and vulgar frauds, trying to mortgage it to German and Italian moneylenders? Yours and ours, this soil of Spain, fertilized by your young blood! The lime of this very land will dissolve, to nourish the bones of beings stalwart in frame, who will keep you living in their memories. In their life you too will live. Take with you that soil of Spain in your hands, comrade, and hold it firmly. It is yours, yours, for ever!

CHAPTER XIII

MY BLONDE FRIEND AND THE SUICIDE

Lieutenant P.'s battery had not yet received the order to open fire. One day, a few weeks later, it had to defend itself for twelve hours, firing blindly, and as it was already surrounded by the enemy, neither P. nor Ossorio nor anyone else has been able to explain how the guns were saved. More than half the artillery-men died. Whilst they were directing their fire, the officers had to defend themselves with their rifles. As the attack was unexpected, and against the camp and Cabeza Lijar simultaneously, the forces of Fernando de Rosa were fully employed, and the young commander died from a bullet in his head.

We went down to Madrid for two days' rest. There they told us that the 'Negus' had been shot in Guadarrama. They told us superfluous details which no one wished to hear, and which, nevertheless, one hears with some pleasure. The 'Negus' had taken off his coat, asking the picket to wait a moment. He gave it to one of the militia. 'It would be a pity', he said, 'to spoil a new coat.' He made no political manifestation. It appeared that they had caught him 'in flagrante delicto', and that he was a spy from personal servility to some of his old protectors whose names he was unwilling to give. Without any real convictions, he died from the 'weakness of the head' of which he used to speak. That weakness had allowed him (it had to have some quality) to foresee how inevitable and how near was his end.

They gave Fernando de Rosa an impressive funeral. All the organizations sent wreaths and representatives. Dozens of

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cars covered with flowers followed the hearse. We were much moved as we watched; more than a hundred thousand men were in the funeral procession. But reflections arose at once in our minds. Was that enthusiasm a force against our enemies. Certainly all these men were ready to shoulder a rifle and to take a bloody vengeance for Fernando. But was their spirit not that of martyrs rather than of soldiers? Was their courage a sign of victory? The spirit of our democracy appeared to us as a spirit of peace, of goodwill to everyone. A spirit civilized and educated. The barbarity of the war lay with our enemies whose spirit was that of the 'gangster' consecrated by Hitler and Mussolini, and spiced by the traditional cruelty of the highest ecclesiastical circles. Our heroic trustfulness, our will to defend ourselves, our readiness for sacrifice—did they provide an efficient resistance? We operated with men; with human beings all equal in social dignity. We respected human life, and could not launch a wave of attack coldly, calculating that of the eight hundred some one hundred and fifty would reach the objectives. The enemy, on the other hand, operated with figures. They calculated their hordes of attacking forces, and said: three thousand Moors and legionaries for such an objective. We shall be content if three hundred reach it. Two thousand would die under our machine-guns, seven hundred under the machine-guns of the fascist rearguard, the rest reach the objective. The poverty and misery of villages in Morocco would supply the necessary numbers. Similar causes would bring the contribution from Italy and Germany. A human surplus sold for iron, at so much a thousand, like cattle.

'Kill, kill,' they kept telling them. 'We will pay you in kind and besides you can occupy the posts which the dead held in civil life. With your claws spotted with blood, you can lengthen and deepen your burrows, and dig yourselves in.'

The Moors and the legionaries were given *carte blanche*. Cheques to cash in the towns they conquered, leave to sack and to violate. In the name of property, the family and order, Franco authorized robbery, violation and assassination. All this robbery, violation, murder was war! A sinister general, Millan Astray, more sinister because of his stupidity and his

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missing eye and empty sleeve—got up at the opening of the University term in Salamanca, after a few biting words from Unamuno ('vencereis, pero no convencereis', you may conquer, but you will not convince) and shouted out: 'Down with intelligence! Long live death!'

We were forced into such reflections as we saw the crowds following the hearse of Fernando de Rosa. I was afraid that all that fervour for our dead comrade was a synthesis of our spirit which was not the spirit of war, but of civilian decency and 'defence'. I had seen much of it at the fronts. Middle-aged men sang the 'International' under shell-fire, so full of emotion that their voices broke in their throats. It was an emotion of civil life, not that of warriors. And I thought that not gaining victory, of which I did not doubt nor do doubt, but acquisition of the spirit of war—a miserable victory—was going to cost the blood of our hearts.

I was worn out with hard days, days always equally hard, in which our efforts had no result except to keep back the enemy. 'By keeping him back we may beat him,' I often thought. But that atmosphere of heroism, forced, permanent and becoming almost routine, fatigued the soul. When heroism had become a part of the day's work, what could happen on extraordinary days?

In Madrid, in some bureaucratic or middle-class intellectual circles, they had begun to discuss some new questions.

'Will Franco get here?' they asked me.

I answered simply that he would, and they were astonished not so much by my reply, as by the indifference with which I made it.

'When?' they insisted.

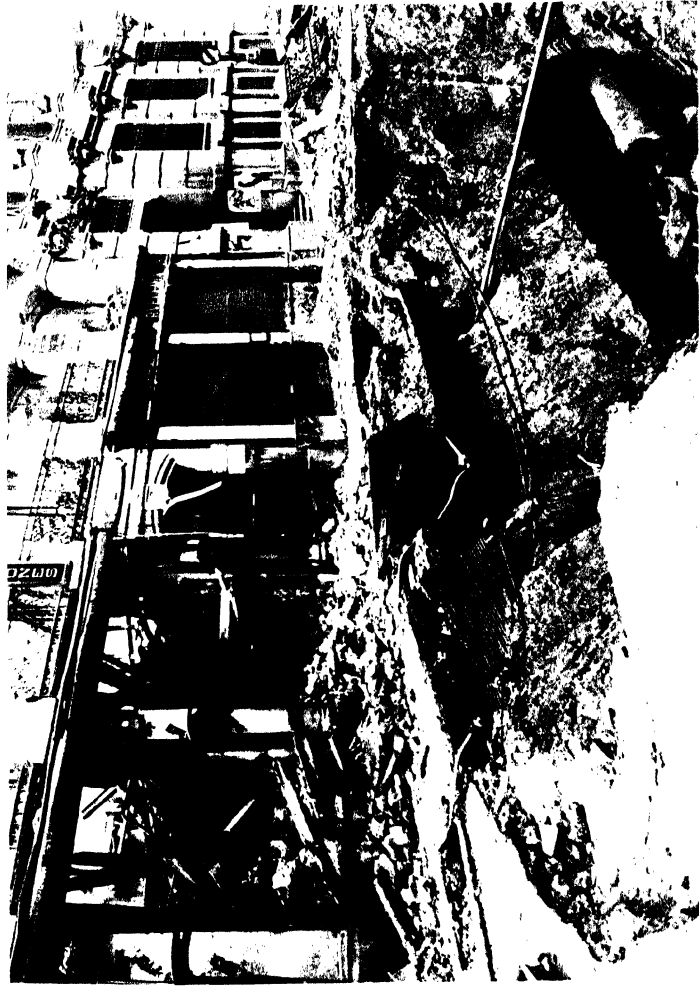
'No one can tell exactly, but it is very likely that shells will fall in the Puerta del Sol within a few weeks.'

'Artillery shells?'

'Yes, of course, artillery shells.'

'But that would be terrible,' they said to each other, 'it would be defeat.'

I agreed with them that it would be terrible, but not that it would be our defeat. 'On the contrary,' I told them, 'it would be Franco's defeat.' No one understood me, nor did



Madrid: San Jeronimo Street. Destruction caused by
the Enemy Aviation

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they wish to believe it. Madrid, the great and secure city, well organized, unanimous in its resistance as everyone worked in the certainty of triumph, could not be in danger. When the Communist Party said that 'it was necessary to fortify Madrid', most people shrugged their shoulders; 'alarmists'. What was happening in the Communist Party was strange. For more than three years they had been giving prophetic warnings. At first these were rejected by everyone. Some even went the length of saying that they were cultivating sensationalism to get notoriety. But their prophecies were fulfilling themselves with a surprising regularity. Every time that facts proved the communists to be right, all the world praised their wisdom, the clearness of their foresight, but when they indicated a new danger, people doubted, and accused them of being alarmists. The new watchword, 'Fortify Madrid', seemed untimely and unreasonable. This reaction of people, and it was the average reaction to the communist prophecies, was due simply to the fact that these prophecies would make it necessary to heighten the spirit and increase the effort. Those who abandoned their comfortable optimism were upsetting their mental tranquillity. Those who were working tranquilly at the pace of peace were forced to quicken their rate. And it urged, stimulated, pushed everyone. Naturally that annoyed many who would have preferred to shut their eyes to reality, and await events quietly, even if they included catastrophe. It was different with the workers and peasants, who were unaccustomed to give up a pleasant reality which they had hardly ever known. But in certain sections of Madrid the lower middle classes were stirred up.

The liberal lower middle classes were breathing tranquilly as they saw the General Staff asking for battalions and sending them to fill breaches here and there. But that did not meet the case, and it was the workers who were crying out at the fronts of Extremadura and Toledo: 'Who is sending us battalion after battalion? There are battalion-eating generals who are ruining our armies, who are sending us men who have not been taught to shoot, who sometimes don't even know how to open the locks of the rifles. And they send them

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to close breaches opened by an enemy with better aviation, better tanks. A battalion which has lost two hundred men before seeing the enemy is already unable to reorganize itself. The survivors take long to recover the morale they had when they enlisted. But the lower middle classes who saw the General Staff recruiting, and the syndicates organizing levies, thought that no one could get near to Madrid, so resolute, so well organized, and from whose depths there came out, in silent enthusiasm, battalions of stone-masons, of shoemakers, of metallurgists, of business assistants, of printers, ready to conquer or die. But the Communist Party kept calling out 'Fortify Madrid', and the Fifth Regiment, which already had seventy thousand men under arms, trained battalions, grouped them into brigades, and after the utmost difficulties, intriguing with the Ministries and with the barracks, and by other devious ways, got together war material, although almost always insufficient. Those who saw the meaning of all these things trembled at every new surprise by the enemy, although our attitude was to grasp our rifles and shrug our shoulders.

'They have broken our front at Peguerinos.'

'Very good. What about it?'

'They are advancing on the Escorial.'

'What about it?'

Workers, peasants, all the militia and most of those who were waiting to be mobilized, clenched their teeth, frowned and muttered:

'Now we shall see.'

I was in such need of a little solitude that instead of going to 'Cultura Popular', I went to my own empty house. It was already getting dusk. I did not find it empty as I hoped, because a girl comrade was there who had come to see what I had in my house useful to a military hospital recently arranged. I had forgotten that I had given her the keys and had offered her the linen that was in the house. I found her in my study searching with curiosity. She knew that it would not annoy me, and so did not make excuses. We chatted. As the surroundings led to discussing domestic affairs, she began to ask me questions as if it were a legal interrogatory:

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'Your wife is a Catholic, a believer?'

'Practising, no. But certainly not quite a sceptic, like all you women.'

She protested too hurriedly. By that precipitation she betrayed herself.

'All right', I admitted, 'you don't go to mass, but nearly all you women who were under religious influence as children are alike in seeing a fantastic and unreal side of things.'

'That would be nothing but love of the romantic.'

'Not at all. Romanticism is an exaggerated realism. Sometimes exaggerated to the point of madness.'

She shrugged her shoulders. They were well-shaped, lively and plump shoulders. She left that subject and went on questioning me. Suddenly she showed an enormous thirst for full details. They were all about my home.

Then I began to talk. She had raised the subject of my family, and the atmosphere of my empty house led me into confidences. She herself seemed like a sister or a cousin, seated on the carpet in a heap of written sheets into which she had been prying. I talked cheerfully at first, but soon my words became more gloomy. When she saw that I was growing more and more confidential, she let me talk, and if she did interpose a word or a gesture, it was to encourage me to go farther. We Spaniards have an exaggerated sentimental modesty, and for that reason our confidences, when we make them, are more valuable. I have avoided repeating all the details of that conversation, and I shall not speak again about my family affairs as I wish to keep them in the shadow of my own mind. Always in my writing I have avoided autobiography. We put too much of ourselves in our books to give the readers anecdotes as well. But perhaps this is not right in my case, which, generalized, is one of the aspects of the civil war which takes and will take the first place in the memory of generations. In defending popular liberties, I have given so much that I have no right to withhold the truth however cruel it is. But that was not to happen to me until two months later.

'This house', I said to my friend, 'is full of them, of my wife and my boys. Solitude for me (the solitude we sometimes seek

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so joyfully) was this: Her, her tenderness in the midst of the laughter of my two children.'

Then we talked about my children. One was already two years old; the little girl, seven months. We turned on a musical box. We spun a humming-top in the little windows of which the current of air produced a deep and harmonious sound as if of crystal. I looked through the wide windows at the green trees and clouds the colour of ivory. My children had a very large window in their room. When they pressed their little faces against the glass they could see down below, at their feet, the hippopotamus, the elephant, the camel, and the bears of the Zoological Park. We could hear the peacocks every day at dawn, and there was one the cry of which said clearly 'me-oon' which upset my boy (because of the meaning of the cry in nursery tradition) when he had wetted his bed.

'In your house', said my friend, 'there was an extraordinary simplicity which was almost offensive. You didn't notice that, but others did.'

'A joy in life almost offensive,' she added. Something of the psychology of war, of our war, appeared in these words. The fascists also were offended by that extraordinary simplicity of the streets and that joy of life which all began to feel as the masses acquired self-confidence.

I remembered some stupid verses, read I don't know where, but which hurt me:

*when everything, soul, garden,
house, is empty.*

I remembered them while I was playing with my revolver on the table. For the moment I thought that I would never go back there to my house, until all was over. It is pleasant to everyone to give way to the luxury of a feeling, and we are not living in a time for luxury. How long the war was lasting! How cold the air of crime, the icy blast of Salamanca, of Badajoz, of Zamora, of León! We had not believed that the war would break two ages, but that it would simply confirm and stimulate a political tendency.

We do not see now with our own eyes, but with the eyes of a million dead. The fascists have murdered more than seven

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hundred thousand. Others have died on the fronts, and 4 per cent. have been shot by us. A million dead. Who among the fascists can speak of triumph after that?

These arid towns of Castile, of Extremadura, where none are left except women and children in mourning. One should go from general to general, asking them: Who wishes victory? Who wishes it? And if they have preserved an atom of moral sense they would die of shame. They have not been military victories, those of Franco, but foul orgies of executioners.

My reflections became more and more gloomy. My friend began to recall happy days, and I tried to lighten my thoughts, to refresh them by memories. A woman's voice within these white walls:

'I am frightened by happiness so great, and I tremble, thinking that the day when it is interrupted a horrible misfortune must come upon us, something nameless and which cannot be imagined.'

I laughed, calling her superstitious, and in the end we both laughed. More recently she has repeated her fears.

'You are a man of the home. It is odd,' said my friend, who was paying more attention to me myself than to what I was saying.

The home is a primitive form of organization, and I have in my blood the old warmth and sometimes also the primitive chill of the frozen soil, distinct like the network of the tilled fields of my own land. This simplicity is good, for in it the complexities which some day will give us a little happiness or misfortune vibrate to every note.

'And you? Are you not a woman of the home?'

'Me, no,' she hurriedly answered, 'I detest it.'

I began to laugh and she amused herself with my laughter as if it were a toy. She continued prying closely. As she saw me reading some old sheets, she moved off a little way, singing in a low voice the medieval song of the princess who wished to seduce the shepherd:

*The neck of the swan is mine, shepherd,
And mine the eyes of a kestrel,
The sharp points of my breasts, shepherd,
Long to pierce their silken sheath.*

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And she herself answered, mimicking the voice of the shepherd:

*In vain do you spread the banquet, lady,
Rudely replied the rustic.
My flock is high on the hills, lady,
And up to my dear sheep I would go.*

‘I should like’, she added, ‘a dangerous life.’

‘More dangerous than that of a middle-class home?’

I tried to explain to her that the *Odyssey*, *Rolandó’s* poem, the song of the *Cid*, the ‘*Araucana*’ were nothing compared with the epics of the home which fill the literature of every country, but she insisted that she longed for the ‘real dangers’.

‘These dangers are boring in themselves. The poisoned arrow has been replaced by the dum-dum bullet, and that is all.’

‘Then there is war and danger in everything?’

‘Life is always dangerous. To live we must not fear these dangers too much, but neither have we to ignore them. The man who ignores them has a daring appearance which dazzles you, but a man feebler than others may die not from the danger itself but from being surprised at the danger. Nothing of that kind concerns certain beings who after making use of reason, hurry to submit. From fear they resign the use of the air to which they have as much right as others. Our dignity rests on using the air to which we are entitled.’

‘Then danger is dignity.’

‘Unfortunately for millions of men’, I replied, ‘dignity and life are inseparable.’

She seized on that vulgar phrase.

‘You see? I see some danger in these words. That pleases me. Dignity is dangerous? Are you one of those who has resigned it?’

She made a disconcerted gesture which all the same was full of small admissions. It was getting dark. The door of the flat had remained open. Little light came in by the windows and we had not turned on the light. The street had houses only on one side. It was open to the west, and so the daylight

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lingered. In front, the Retiro Park stretched like a great green lake. It was a wide quiet street, with four rows of trees, huge blocks of buildings six or seven stories high, with wide windows between the grey cement and the red bricks.

From the street came up the reflection from the first gas-lamps dimmed against the enemy aeroplanes by blue paint on the glass. We were discussing lightly all sorts of serious matters, as was the custom in Madrid in these days, when we started at hearing a revolver shot. It had been fired close to us, perhaps on the terrace, or even on the staircase. I rose up, and turned on the light. I went out, revolver in hand, and met someone in the hall who was coming in.

'Who are you?' I asked.

He apologized and was going out again but I was quicker and interposed.

'All right', he said with a twisted smile, 'consider me your prisoner.'

By the dim light I saw that he was a young man of about thirty years, well dressed, with a nervous and alert expression. He looked really tired. He took out a revolver, and holding it by the barrel, handed it to me. I could not recover from my astonishment.

'Who are you, and why have you come to my house?'

I saw my friend stretching out her head, half grave and half curious. The unknown person excused himself as if it had been nothing worse than an indiscretion:

'I saw that the door was open, and thought that there was no one here. Please excuse me.'

'But it seemed that you came in to escape.'

'Two members of the committee of the house were pursuing me,' he excused himself.

'Why?'

He seemed to be putting himself at ease, and did so by being absolutely sincere.

'I am one of your enemies.'

He added with a mixture of humility and pride:

'I look on myself as a prisoner from now. You can detain me, and take me to prison. Or you can shoot me. I have come to a point when I am quite indifferent about everything.'

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That open statement deserved confidence as much as friendship would have deserved it. We went into my study. My friend had vanished into the passages, as if she had fled. But I had a feeling that she was still somewhere about, listening.

'You must see', I said to the unknown man, 'that this is a little irregular. Tell me your name and explain why you are our enemy.'

I spoke stressing the note of confidence. The unknown man gathered that I did not believe him.

'I am really one of your enemies. My name alone would condemn me to death. I am a fascist. I was the intermediary between Calvo Sotelo and Oriol, he who gave the money.'

I insisted:

'What is your name?'

'I shall not tell you it,' he refused with some effort. 'I know that in any case they will kill me. But as I have to die, I prefer to leave you with the impression of an honourable man. If I tell you my name you may make some inferences from it that would cause the death of someone else.'

He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a case full of cartridges and put it on the table. He made a gesture as if he wished to avoid the light in his eyes. And then I noticed that his revolver, which had remained on the table, was cocked. I took the cartridge out of the magazine.

'You are rash,' I said to him.

He tried to smile:

'Perhaps, but not in the matter of the revolver; I brought it here for prudence,' and added, laughing frankly but rather defiantly. 'Just think that I might have wished to kill you, but you didn't give me time to aim.'

'I rejoice that you hadn't that idea.'

He shrugged his right shoulder:

'It is not worth while being glad. It is only a postponement. Not a single young man in Spain will come out of this alive. Some of them die for "the ideal",' and he smiled ironically. 'Others for their rents, which is an ideal much more concrete and more intelligent.'

Although he did not become actually insolent, there was something repellent about him. He repeated that I should

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fall any day, that all of us, the militia, were committing suicide, although in any case liberalism and idealism were suicidal positions. 'You will fall to-morrow,' he repeated with an obstinacy which began to betray his fanaticism. So far he had seemed to me a mistaken but intelligent man. As he had passed over to blind hatred, I replied in similar terms:

'Perhaps I may fall to-morrow, but if what you say about yourself is true, you will go first.'

I had spoken without animosity. He kept looking at me:

'I am glad to hear you say that. You people are surfeited with a humanitarian gentleness. But for that we should have been beaten by now. You love life too much, and so do not win. You are atheists, and yet, or perhaps even because of that, you attach a religious sentiment to life. Life for you is a mystical ideal which has to be deserved and attained. That weakens you.'

I was unwilling to follow him along that line. I came back to my investigations. I asked him exactly what had brought him to my house and not to the house next door, and with a careless manner, he told me a tale of having escaped along the flat roofs from the end house, which overlooked the mobile park of the police. According to his story, he had been there at night firing at those who entered or left the park. 'Until now,' he added, 'when perhaps everything is finished for me, I have done what I could for my side. Perhaps they did not deserve it, but I have fulfilled my mission.' That phrase, 'fulfilling my mission' again made him appear a fanatic. I told him that his behaviour was nothing but monstrous desperation.

'Don't think that,' he said. 'Never for a moment have I lost calmness, and still less now, as you can see. We shall win the war, and win it because of our gay indifference about blood. Men must be reminded that they are wild animals and that they must always be so until the end. Even on our side, they don't all know that. There are tamed wild beasts as in circuses. Domesticated wild animals.'

Using with him moral reactions which I am accustomed to employ in my own case, and perhaps wishing to annoy him, I said that such a conception of man only sprang from vanity.

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We are not all so bad. Vanity fills the life of weaklings, and may lead them even to death. He was going to reply when my friend came in and sat down in a chair opposite the stranger. To avoid the disagreeableness of facing him, she sat sideways on the arm of the chair. He had bowed as she came in, and asked if he was not disturbing us. I said that he was not, but that her presence made much difference in our talk. The stranger replied cautiously, saying only: 'Perhaps.'

And by that word, spoken casually, I saw the extremity in which he certainly felt himself. I looked at my friend. She was deeply moved by the presence of the stranger, which sometimes made me think that I was seeing a familiar scene. It seemed as if it had often happened before between ourselves in the same house. That began after my friend came back. A presentiment suddenly came into my mind. On the pretext of locking the door of the flat I went out, naturally taking the revolver with me, so as to leave them alone for a few minutes. Before going, I looked at her in the eyes. They still held an expression of surprise. But if they took advantage of my absence to speak alone together, their expression would lose its fixity and I should notice the change on my return. I stayed away a few minutes. On my return I found no change in her. She was as much over-excited as before. Her eyes remained charged as with electricity, and gazed at things without seeing them. I hoped that after speaking alone with the stranger, these eyes would have lost their vagueness, as after a physical spasm.

'Have you locked the door? It was unnecessary,' he said.

I sat down again and asked him to give me his papers of identity, if he had any.

'Do you think that I would carry papers in my present extremity?'

He said that he had nothing in his pockets, not even money. On my asking him how he had lived since the rebellion began he excused himself, repeating that he would say nothing which could prejudice third parties. 'You can't think that wrong.' As we kept staring at him, he added:

'You may believe that I have no strong reasons to be grateful or indeed to be loyal to many of my side.'

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That was a good subject on which it might be possible to make him give himself away. I pressed him gently:

'It is often your own fault for expecting too much from others.'

He made a scornful gesture and emphasized it with an unexpected phrase, which left me surprised. 'They are a herd of swine. Even if they save their skins they will be lucky.'

He must have spent many days without talking, and although he seemed more than ready to talk, plainly he would take care not to compromise anyone. 'I'd be glad if not one of them remained alive, even if for no other purpose than to teach their sons.'

'To teach them what?' I asked.

'To die.'

That was a piece of romanticism. I looked at my friend, thinking that my suspicion about the strange apparition of the man was without foundation. My suspicion had failed. I wished to go on trying to make the stranger speak.

'What do you think your friends ought to do? For every one of them there are ten thousand of ours in Madrid.'

'That doesn't matter,' he replied in a disillusioned way. 'Their duty is to attack.'

After another silence, filled with echoes from the street or from the staircase which could not be identified, the stranger asked an unexpected question:

'Will you let me give the order to shoot?'

That appeared to be an exhibition of romantic vanity. If my friend had not been there, perhaps he would not have said it. I looked at her to let the stranger know that I understood him, and that he was making a hero of himself in front of a woman who certainly attracted him, because my friend was attractive to everyone. Then I replied:

'You are anticipating things. Besides, supposing that they do shoot you, I shall not be in command of the picket.'

'One must know how to lose,' he said, as if to justify his indifference to death. 'I know how to lose, as you see. . . . They have not won my life, but I myself throw it at your feet.' For the first time he became animated and excited. 'It is my tip to the gravediggers. All the life that remains to me, every

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minute of which is worth a year of ordinary life, I give it to you as a present. It is for you. I am disgusted with everything, including us, my own people, who don't know how to fight, the conquered who don't know how to give in, the executioners who don't know how to kill with elegance and pleasure.'

He became so excited as to shout:

'To hell with everything. I have no wish to remain alive. For what? Even if we were to win to-night what sort of triumph would it be? We are going to be the slaves for ever of Otto von Müller, the sausage merchant, and of Cabronni della Floresta, the mandolinist.'

He uttered a nervous guffaw and rose up. I could not reconcile these gestures, these shouts, with his former calm correctitude.

'Do you know why I surrender so readily? Because I have read an article in a communist newspaper', he pulled it out from his pocket, 'about the need of defending the Spanish soil against Italians and Germans. Here it is,' he pointed with his finger, 'I have read it and agree with it. In agreement with you,' he spat on the side. 'What filth! It may be that it was an impulse of weakness in me, of cowardice. The tendency to agree with you from fear. I could see myself as an officer of militia, repeating humanitarian vaguenesses, in the fronts, and in the newspapers. And I myself have anticipated decorating and punishing myself at the same time.'

He shouted and gesticulated. My friend stared at him, with her face livid. I measured the distance which separated me from the revolver, and begged him to sit down. At last he did so, murmuring in his normal voice:

'I too wear a red star on my breast, like you. But mine is real.'

He opened his jacket. On his shirt there was a great stain of blood, between the left nipple and the shoulder. He covered himself again. I rose up. So did my friend. Without addressing the stranger, whom I regarded as a suicidal maniac, I asked my friend to call up the nearest hospital to send an ambulance. The stranger refused that, energetically several times, and other times with supplications. I asked him if he were able to walk, and he answered that he could.

MY BLONDE FRIEND AND THE SUICIDE

'Go away as you came. I know nothing. I have seen nothing. Get away with you.'

He rose up and was about to go out. I made a signal to my friend to go with him and take him to the nearest first-aid station. My friend had almost gone out when I detained her a moment:

'You know that man?'

She didn't answer, from which I inferred that she did know him. I even asked her if she had been expecting him here in my house, when I arrived. She said 'No' so emphatically that I understood 'Yes'. I pushed her gently to the door and she disappeared after him. I went back to my study, walked backwards and forwards from corner to corner for some minutes, without knowing what to do, and then I also went out.

I was going down the stairs when I met a neighbour who was coming up. He was a doctor, a very old man, about eighty, who was still in practice, attending to his patients. He had a good professional reputation. He was proud of being a classical liberal and federalist of the school of Piy Margall. He was well dressed. The house committee had given him the duty of being on guard on the roof for the first quarter of the night. He did that duty one night every fortnight. He explained to me in great detail how he carried out the duty, and clearly was enthusiastic about it. He was carrying a paper bag filled with bits of cabbage, rotting potatoes and other pieces of solid food. He told me that always when he came on duty he collected these scraps from the refuse bins on every landing, because there were careless neighbours who, when air-warnings sounded, did not obey the order to put out all their lights. Then he, from his high place of observation, looked at the inner courtyards and seeing which windows were still illuminated threw the pieces of cabbage and so forth at them as a punishment and a warning. When they heard a knock, they put out the lights at once.

'What is necessary,' he said, as he was on his way up, hoping to give us 'young ones' a lesson, 'let everyone do their job as I do mine.'

'He took all that very seriously, and if on one of his night's

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of duty there were no air-raid, he must have come down with his bag of refuse, quite disappointed.

I went out. I was going to 'Cultura Popular' to sleep as I was afraid of the solitude in my house. Of my writing table, no longer my own table but one in a railway station. Of the walls without echoes. Of the meaningless light.

As I was going to a street, about a quarter of a mile lower down, I saw the stranger. He was staggering in the middle of a crowd of children and chattering women. There were also two or three men and among them the porter of my house. On the edge of the little crowd, my friend was watching and hesitating. The stranger seemed to have uttered violent words against someone, and they were hurling insults at him, but considering him drunk and so not responsible. He was reeling miserably in the middle of the crowd. He began to speak contemptuously again, and there was a small uproar. They seemed to be going to assault him. And then I saw, just as I came round the corner, my friend run towards him in a hurry, crying out: 'He is wounded! He is wounded!'

CHAPTER XIV

JOSÉ LEÓN, PLUMBERS' DELEGATE AND COMMANDER OF INFANTRY

On the same afternoon comrades of the patrol had come to seek me in 'Cultura Popular'. They returned next morning. They came with a swagger. Shaved, with new boots, clean shirts. And they all wore another badge on the breast. The Fifth Regiment of Militia had raised all of them from the ranks, and had asked the Ministry of War to confirm the brevets. They were happy and talkative. The sergeants were as pleased as the officers. Bodín, now recovered from his wound, was a second lieutenant. Vicente, a sergeant. Two others, lieutenants.

'But the best is to come!' they shouted, 'the best is to come!' 'Prepare for a surprise.'

One of them bade them be silent and assumed a solemn air.

'We have chosen you', he said, 'as our captain. The Regiment approved warmly and have sent the proposal to the Ministry. It is up to you now.'

I had filled my little room on the third floor with books and press cuttings, and had brought up a type-writing machine. I intended to get to work. But instead I locked my door, left everything as it was and asked:

'Where do we go?'

'To the Tagus. To start this very night.'

How could I let my comrades go alone? I accepted, delighted, and they ornamented my shirt with the badges which they had brought all ready. To the devil with my plans, my press cuttings and my books!

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'It seems that things are going badly.' My comrades said these words in a tone which meant: 'and so we must all go there together.' Was I going to leave them?

That day 'Cultura Popular' had to put up with all the patrol. They invited us to dinner. Afterwards we had to legalize the matrimonial affairs of Bodín and Gascó, who had been living for two years with their companions without having married them, and as now they intended to throw in their lot definitely with the army of the Tagus, disorganized after the fall of Toledo, they were afraid of dying without having regularized the domestic matter. Each of them had a son.

'At least', said Bodín, with his childish laugh, 'we must leave them as widows. And if we don't marry', he said to his woman chaffingly, 'you couldn't be a widow.'

When the legal documents had been signed, I had to say a few words trying to harmonize the respect for the ceremony with the joyful spirit of camaraderie. I declared the two couples to be man and wife. The husbands said that I must kiss their wives, and so I did. These were very happy at the honour done them by their mates in confirming their union socially and publicly, especially at a moment when they had just been promoted to be officers in the army of the people. We brought brandy, and danced to a gramophone in a great salon of the palace. The girls of 'Cultura Popular' were delighted. As we were returning to the front that night they went out of their way to leave us with a pleasant memory.

Gascó danced by himself in the centre, a dance of his own invention. As he was broad, muscular and short, his agility was amusing. His feet, his shoulders and his head all were big and rugged, and this gave him an original charm like that of the carving on the old Roman capitals. He devised figures of the oddest kind, with light movements of the arms, or crouching like a toad, or waddling with short steps like a penguin, or like an orang-utan with head sunk between his shoulders. We all laughed until we could laugh no more. Everything was pleasant and in good form. I have not found in any other place this easy good taste, the faculty of entering into the spirit of a thing, which the lower-class Spaniards

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possess. They could give lessons to many of the French or German middle-classes, and they are continuously doing so to the Spanish middle-class.

At dusk we went out to go to the staff quarters of the Fifth Regiment. A colonel who had just come back from the Tagus called me aside and gave me a summary of the situation. He began by saying that 'it was going very badly'.

'But——so very badly?'

'Yes. Imagine what you like.'

I tried to get something definite.

'Have we at least a regular front?' I asked.

'Nothing of that kind.'

'Perhaps some reliable positions?'

The colonel stated with bitter irony:

'As reliable as water in a basket.'

'Then it is all up?'

'I don't know. Do what you can. If you do save the position you will have done a big thing. But as soon as you arrive get into talk with Commander José León.'

The Fifth Regiment was not a corps with regular officers like those of a regiment of the army, but was the parent nucleus of a great part of the popular militia, enlisted, directed and trained by the communists. From this corps notable leaders had come who had been militant communists. Some were well known, such as Francisco and José Ma. Galan. Others were almost unknown, such as Castro, Lister, García, the brothers Bartolomé, Valverde, 'el Campesino', Varela, Ortega. In the midst of the improvisation going on everywhere the Fifth Regiment formed bodies really militarized. The leaders had trained themselves under the fire of the enemy, in successes, or in the fierce resistance of every hour. In the first few weeks of the war, the Fifth Regiment had to face alone many very grave problems. I have seen García—a metallurgical worker—a young man of thirty years, deal with situations which baffled a professional General Staff, and solve them simply, without giving more attention to them than they required, without losing his head over them like some political leaders. We were once in the headquarters of the General Staff at Guadarrama. We could not always hear

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each other because of shells exploding all round us, sometimes in the garden itself. The enemy was attacking with the utmost fury. It was about nine o'clock at night. The batteries and the trenches were telephoning constantly. When the clamour was at its highest they called from Peguerinos asking for reinforcements. The professional staff did its best to conceal its perturbation. The attack became more violent.

'What reinforcements are we going to send, and how can we send them? Besides it is night and quite dark.'

García had come there by chance on one of his usual visits as a member, not of the official General Staff, but of the General Staff of the Militia. He made some calculations. A hundred men could be drawn from such and such a position, fifty from another. There was no need for anxiety there, because the fortifications were strong and their machine-guns crossed fire with those of another position over the only place where it was possible that the enemy would attempt an assault. As we were not going to counter-attack, these men were not indispensable.

'Besides,' he added, 'there must be in the Escorial another five hundred men who left Madrid this afternoon. We must telephone to them not to move, but to await orders.'

'Will that be enough?' asked the colonel with some anxiety. With them and another four hundred men who are coming up from Collado on foot and whom I myself saw, there will be more than enough. We must warn these comrades not to go up to Guadarrama. They must stay at the cross-roads and use the lorries of the Service Corps and of the artillery which were there. The Escorial was already on the telephone. García in his tranquil manner was dictating to the telephonist what was necessary. A messenger went to give their orders to those who were arriving and to the drivers of the lorries. Shells continued to fall all round us.

'Instruct position N. to send out a hundred men and let them go down under cover of hill L. to the road. They are then to move on to the cross-roads and wait there.'

'And the other fifty?'

'Leave them there,' said García, shrugging his shoulders. 'It seems that they are now pressing by Valdelasierra and by the

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Sanatorium, on both flanks. It would be dangerous to move them from the trenches. Those in the other position are better placed.'

He knew the ground at Guadarrama from memory better than the other chiefs from the maps. When they were telephoning to the advanced position, García went up to the telephonist and told him, 'At least seventy of the hundred must be communists.' He looked at his watch, said goodbye to the colonel, and called out to him from the door: 'You can tell Peguerinos to hold on, and that the reinforcements will be with them within two hours.'

'Whom are we sending with the reinforcements,' asked the colonel.

'I am going myself,' García replied indifferently.

Then the colonel called me aside and said:

'Cannot the communists send us here a young man like him, to be always with us?'

In a few minutes we went off in García's car. The headlights were turned off, and the rear lamp, which was lighted automatically when braking, was covered with a piece of sacking. When we reached the cross-roads García ordered the sentinels to detain the battalion which was coming up from Collado and not to allow any of them to return to Madrid.

'Where are you going now?' I asked him.

'To supper. We must keep up our strength for to-night.'

I repeated the colonel's words to him, and García replied: 'Naturally; they would like us to do all the work.'

We had supper in Collado without making any allusion to the march to Peguerinos, delighted with the little incidents of the meal. Half an hour later, the forces collected at the cross-roads and set off in the lorries for the Escorial, where they joined with the men who had come from Madrid. The goodwill and enthusiasm of every individual prevented many of the problems which, in the regular army, often embarrass the movements of troops. We were in Peguerinos at the time we promised. The attack was repulsed, the enemy losing many men and much material. It was one of Mola's heaviest defeats. The hundred militia were sent back to the command at Gua-

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darrama by eleven in the morning, and the situation having been saved, García returned to Madrid and threw himself on a sofa at headquarters to sleep for a few hours.

Although he had done everything, I never heard him mentioned nor saw his name in any newspaper. In that he was like many other members of the Communist Party who did things without anyone knowing about them, and their only preoccupation being to get them well done.

Influenced by the impressions, not reassuring, of the colonel, we left Madrid crowded in a car with seven seats. There were five officers, three sergeants and myself. We reached Cabañas in an hour, and we got out of the car about a mile and a half beyond that village at the place where the road was crossed by the railway. The car went back to Madrid, and we left the road and walked on foot along the railway line. About sixty yards farther on the land fell sharply on each side, leaving the railway line on an embankment. The embankment was steep and in less than a mile was fifteen or sixteen yards above the level of the ground. A motor cyclist met us, coming along on a goat track. When we asked him where to find Commander León, he told us to go on to the nearest bridge. We walked on for less than a mile. It was nearly midnight, but a little moonlight filtered through the cloudy sky. At the bridge, under the heavy iron beams which supported the railway girders, we saw four or five men huddled on the ground, fast asleep. It was very cold and each was lightly covered by a blanket. The big field boots of most of them were stuck out from under the blanket. Their heads were resting on the ground itself, or on their knapsacks or on their folded jackets, and they had their rifles between their legs. No one was to be seen on either side of the railway, nor was there any sound. I crossed to the other side of the embankment and listened for some little time. Nothing could be heard except the snores of the sleepers. At last I heard a few rifle shots to the left of the embankment, perhaps a mile and a half away.

My comrades had wakened Commander León, who sat up rubbing his eyes.

‘Ah ! It is you,’ he said after a time.

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He was a man of about five and twenty years, tall and strong, a hundred per cent. proletarian.

'If you like', he said to me, 'we can see the sector tomorrow. For the present the best thing you can do is to lie down here and sleep.'

We followed the example of the others and lay down. I had no blanket, but as I was leaving the commandancia, I saw a heavy coat, the classical coachman's coat of Dickens; I didn't know who was the owner, but it was my size. I kept it, and thanks to it, I am able to tell this story, as otherwise I should have been frozen to death on one of these mornings. Until I slept in the camp at Bargas, I didn't know what cold was. Here everything that can be imagined about cold happened; we felt like icicles, our teeth chattered, we were frozen and so on. In the temporary shelter where we had to sleep during the following nights, we must have seemed like a litter of new-born kittens, one complaining here, the other there. Our breath was like a cloud of steam, and the moisture condensed and then froze in our mufflers.

I didn't sleep that night. That has always been my weak spot. I eat or I don't eat, I am well or badly shod, I may be cold or thirsty. None of these things matters much, but sleep is necessary for me. If I don't sleep at least six hours, I seem to be in a dream, feel light-headed and am nervous and irritable, and in a few days I become as worn out as an old man.

They waked us at dawn and we rose up. A little water was boiled in an empty petrol tin, and a few ham-bones, covered with earth and ants, were thrown in. While León was showing me our position on the map and that of the enemy, a greasy and unpleasant broth was cooking, which we swallowed with avidity and which afterwards upset our digestion badly.

The objective of our sector was to resist possible attacks of the flank of the enemy, which already was holding advanced positions on the road from Extremadura to Madrid. We were under the general staff of Olias, the duties of which were discharged by an old lieutenant-colonel, thin, vivacious and with a long white moustache. Our advanced troops were under machine-gun fire from the church tower of Bargas, on which the enemy had a post of observation. The front line of

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the enemy was about a mile and a half below Bargas towards the railway, facing some dense olive groves which occupied the ground to the south, as far as the camp of Olias. Our artillery almost constantly exchanged shells from that village with the artillery of Bargas. The peasants said that the commander of the Bargas artillery was a native of the village and directed the fire personally. If anything could be said in his honour (the honour he would certainly wish to retain), it was that he was an excellent artillery officer. He could place his shots where he pleased.

We had not batteries with which to reply to his guns, but the railway embankment gave us an excellent defence. All the concentrations and movements of our troops were safeguarded by that high embankment without which we could not have resisted for a single hour. The railway gave us other advantages. Where the embankment ended, and the line descended to the natural level of the ground, the railway was enclosed in a wide cutting which passed through a chain of hills, and offered us a still better refuge. This happened between the second bridge and Bargas station. That station for the moment belonged to no one. It was in 'No-man's land', occupied neither by them nor by us. Sometimes patrols reached it, but could not maintain themselves there, and after having made observations returned to their base. For such movements the railway line was of great strategical value, because even in the stretches where it was on ground level, without embankment or cutting, it had a ditch on each side (the platelayers used to call them 'fire-escapes') in which a man was invisible if he went down on all fours.

The olive groves also were very useful to us. Whatever was going on, the railway line and the olive groves would be our points of support.

Although my duty was simply to be in charge of a company, from the moment of my arrival León gave me to understand that I was to share with him responsibility for the sector. When I protested, he said with many words and gestures:

'I also ought to confine myself to commanding my battalion but as there is no one to look after the section, I do it myself.'

To organize the company the usual details of mobilizing

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and recruiting had to be carried out under fire from the enemy, and not with peasants and workmen of unshaken morale, but with the remnants of units which had been shattered. When I asked for 'my company', León nodded towards some groups scattered in the rear-guard, with weapons or without them, and told me that I had to organize and enrol my company out of these individuals. My comrades of the patrol and I set to work. It wasn't easy. We had to select the most resolute out of the remains of the units which had evacuated Toledo and were now going about without officers, without countersigns, without equipment and often without weapons. Those we selected helped us to get others. A militia second-lieutenant who had saved some squads of his company helped us very much. Every militiaman had his own Odyssey to relate and naturally wished to tell it. But we did not listen to them. We said 'Yes, Yes' to everyone and took down their names.

By night we were able to form two companies behind the embankment; some three hundred men with their squads all complete and their rolls of corporal, sergeant-major and captain, or it might be of platoon section and company. They seemed compact and of good enough morale, although each soldier within himself had every reason to feel discouraged. The military service corps had been so inefficient—afterwards they found that there was a traitor among those in charge of provisioning—that the militia were happy from the day of arrival because they had a meal every day even although a cold one. It consisted of ham and a ration of bread which they threw into our trenches from the armoured train which passed every day. The train could not stop there because the place was enfiladed by the enemy, who attacked it with direct fire; otherwise they would have brought us hot food. The militia had no weapons other than rifles and cartridge cases. We had brought two light machine-guns from Guadarrama and about fifteen boxes of hand-grenades and we kept these for our own companies.

The fronts on that section were badly disorganized, especially ours. The Government wished to arrange fixed lines, but they were facing an enemy of great mobility, who

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always avoided frontal attacks. To hold the attack of the African hordes and the German and Italian machines, a front of nearly a hundred and twenty miles would have been required, from Ciudad Real to Peguerinos. The arrangement of Franco in the Extremadura fronts after the fall of Talavera amounted only to a camp of less than a mile on each side of the high road, and had neither mystery nor strategical skill. It was a question of material—the Italian armoured cars and the 'Junker' aeroplanes. Our weak lines, wherein no big battles took place, did not consist in that sector of more than a thousand men with as many rifles, and three or four machine-guns. Were Franco capable of an honest reply it would be worth while to ask him how many of our aeroplanes he brought down in his advance and how many guns he captured or destroyed. The reply would show the real extent of so many 'triumphs' so freely advertised abroad, and because of which Franco, by miracles of the middle-class inferiority complex of journalists accustomed to write on their knees, was regarded as a new giant of history. Poor Franco! If he knew that he would swell with joy!

Every day we organized resistance a little better in the sector. We came to have several battalions, with some artillery and an armoured train. They could not roll up our line. We straightened it and to-day we still hold it.



Scenes from the Front

CHAPTER XV

PREPARING TO ATTACK

To show the spirit of organization in our militia, of whom I have spoken several times, and from whom we have received proofs of discipline and combative spirit, I shall relate some facts about hand-grenades. In each box there was half a yard of the yellow tinder-fuse which peasants employ to light their cigarettes. The fuse provides a practical way of carrying a light in the hand to set fire to grenades. As soon as they saw the fuse in a box, they opened all the other cases to get hold of the tinder, and divided it joyfully. As most of them used lighters of that kind, they found the new supply very opportune. Warnings and explanations were necessary before we could make them return them.

On the night after our arrival the companies took up positions behind some curving little hills rising straight up from the railway line. In that way we closed the line up to Cerro Mariel, an excellent outpost which dominated an expanse of six or seven miles. We had to carry the grenades thither by hand next day. Two militia carried every case by the handles. We advised them of the road to follow so as to escape the notice of the Bargas observation post, from which our smallest movements were watched day and night. The first set of militia bore that in mind, but later on they took a short cut. The enemy, who must have thought that we had an ammunition dump there, or that we were making one, opened a concentrated gun-fire on our positions. The trench in which we were putting the grenades was quite deep. My shelter was alongside it.

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When the cannonade began, I was at the first bridge with León and some captains. I had gone down to persuade León to keep all the grenades for my companies. The militia had just arrived with the last case when the first cannon fire was heard. It burst between the posts on the left of my line. 'It has fallen on Gascó,' I concluded. Immediately three other shots were heard. The explosions must be destroying almost all the parapet in that section of our line.

'They must have a grudge against my comrades! Salud!'

I walked towards our positions and climbed up at the left end. On the way I came on another officer, and we walked together. We didn't trouble to take cover. As they had located us it would have been useless, and at heart it pleased me that the enemy artillery men should see two officers on foot smoking under the shells. We supposed that it would annoy them. But, besides, it was necessary that at a moment of considerable danger the militia, whose morale was low, should see our behaviour. The fire from the batteries increased. There wasn't a safe spot on the hill. The guns were 7·5, each firing four times a minute, and the shells curved over, seeking us between the little mounds. I hoped that as the ground had been prepared for sowing, with the soil soft, half the projectiles would not explode, but they all did so. Listening closely for the growl of each one, we moved from post to post.

The militia, flat on the ground behind the light parapets we had made the night before, were enduring it as best they could. Every explosion was for me both a shock and a pleasant surprise, because when the smoke had cleared away I saw how the militia nearest to the explosion answered my smile with smiles of their own. 'There has been no casualty,' I thought, and breathed freely whilst new strings of shells came through the air. Seeing the two officers standing up, the militia felt quite safe lying down behind their parapet. But, as we listened attentively, we were not running any great risks. Our experiences at Guadarrama and Peguerinos were of some use to us. We could tell within a few yards where each shell was going to land.

'That one is for you, Gascó!'

The shell exploded close to him. He thrust his unhurt head

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from under his arms, and we could hear him whispering, 'Son of a bitch.' But he didn't stop laughing.

'Your turn now, Bodín!'

The explosion perhaps would cover him with earth. His laughing protests were still being uttered when I felt that a shell was coming on our heads. My head rang with its buzzing as it came down. We threw ourselves on the ground behind Gascó's parapet. The shell struck within two yards of us with a great noise but did not explode. We raised our heads.

'If they wish to hit us', I said, 'they will have to take another shot.'

The words had scarcely left my mouth when the shell did explode, carrying away the parapet, destroying our defences, and covering us with earth. But we came out of it unhurt. So that the comrades might know it, we got up again and revisited the posts.

'Let them waste their munition,' the militia were saying to each other.

I cheered them up by saying, 'They have gone mad.' But the humming of the shells must have made my voice grate like a radio loud-speaker. The shells, as they came over in curves, had a diabolical grace. The functions of the senses were reversed. One saw them by the ear. They came groaning, humming, singing. And how clear-cut the explosion! Born of number and of direction, mathematical, purposeful, they came bringing certain death. A pity that they cause physical pain. Were they to carry with them some anaesthetic, it would be beautiful to submit to be killed by these small and neat shells around whose waists is a rosy girdle of copper on which the sun sparkles for a quarter of a second.

The bombardment could not be the prelude to an assault, because they would have used their heavy guns on the railroad to prevent the arrival of the armoured train. With a few short pauses it continued from eleven o'clock until half-past one. At times when the cannonade was very highly concentrated, and when we were assured that the nerves of the militia had become accustomed to the shells, I went down into my trench, which was as narrow and deep as a grave. Bodin was also there, right on the top of four cases of hand-grenades.

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'They are going to hit us,' said he to me in a joke, 'and the shell will pass us without exploding, and will hit the box of grenades, and when it explodes the grenades will explode too, under our guts, so that the sanitary people will have to collect us in buckets instead of in a litter.'

I don't understand now how these words could have amused us, but we laughed. When the bombardment stopped, the edges of our trench had disappeared. A fragment of shell dropped gently on Bodín's shoulder, still hot, so that it burnt his jacket, but did not upset him.

'The Inquisition has come back again,' he said. 'They wish to burn us alive!'

The only casualty we had was an officer, Rafael, a comrade of ours at Guadarrama. A fragment, minute as a grain of sand, had scraped his temple, making an almost imperceptible scratch. He himself didn't notice it, but I saw that his face was bloody and asked him if he was wounded. He said he wasn't. But the bombardment went on, and the air was so thick with the gases from the exploding shells that they poisoned him through the little scratch.

In the afternoon, Rafael, brave young man, was indignant when he found that his face and the wrist of his right hand were inflamed without any apparent reason. Next day his face would have suited him had he been a stone heavier, and yellow-tipped pimples came out on it. His appearance was unpleasant, and he went about repeating:

'I don't know what bloodiness this is!'

His Galician accent made his anger seem deeper and more ingenuous. I told him that he would have to go to the hospital. He refused, but the inflammation got worse and as we feared lest it were infectious we sent him off. It seems to have disappeared after a few daily injections.

Meantime interesting events were taking place between Bargas and Olias. León was in high spirits since our arrival. He insisted that I should hand over to Bodín the command of the company, and attach myself to him as general staff officer. But I have never liked any work better than that of the captain of the company. The relations with the soldiers were direct and intimate, and it was full of responsibilities almost paren-

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tal in their nature. I felt in a way as if I were father of the whole company. I was careful not to subject them to unnecessary danger; the arm of a soldier was an extension of my own arm, and never did I accept the bounty of the head of the service corps, a sycophant, like all traitors, who sent special food for me and the officers. None of these, naturally including myself, ever ate except with the soldiers, the same food and at the same time. Since then I have sometimes thought that the service chief was zealously trying to create resentment between the officers and the men.

That night we had just lain down, wrapping up our heads in our capes on the shattered ground, when an officer called out:

‘There are fifteen militia who wish to go off.’

‘How can that be?’ I asked in surprise.

‘Yes. They wish to go. They say that a proclamation has been issued saying that until the 10th those who wish to do so are free to demobilize themselves.’

I had read something of the kind in the newspapers. They brought me the fifteen men. The whole of our army on that front and elsewhere was voluntary. Sometimes it was impossible to exact service from them, because their obligations were conditional in very many respects. The decree had the object of forming, from October 10, a more regular army with stricter obligations and responsibilities. It tried to exclude some units directed, for instance, by the anarchists, which had failed neither from cowardice nor from want of goodwill, but from a natural incapacity for organization. Moreover, in some parts of Spain the C.N.T. had rashly opened its doors to members of the lower and even the upper middle classes with too great an eagerness to proselytize, and through its syndicates people had entered who were not merely indifferent or neutral, but what was worse, dangerous and treacherous.

• Like most of my company, the fifteen militia men were peasants from the province of Córdoba; many of them illiterate. It was not easy to make them understand, except by the simplest and most concrete facts. We had been able to collect and enrol them because of two facts: the regular supply of food once daily, and a distribution of overcoats and blankets.

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But I knew that there was in the company a little focus of discontent. These fifteen cleared up the position.

'You don't wish to fight with us?' I asked them.

'It is because we wish to fight on the fronts in our own province.'

They were right in principle, but if there had been no more than that in it they would have waited for a regular relief, and once withdrawn they could have opened the question in Madrid, far from the responsibilities of the front. But they were quite determined. I read bad faith in their obstinacy. They didn't wish to remain at the front. That was all.

'You are afraid?' I asked.

They all hurried to deny that.

'Then?'

'It is because from the 10th we shall have to stay in the militia, and we cannot become permanent soldiers because our families in the village have nothing but what we earn by our work.'

'Your families have their living secure while you are here. The town council, the Socorro Rojo and other organizations for public relief which you know, are working day and night so that your minds may be easy.'

They agreed about that, but still wished to go. I touched a sentimental note:

'Are you going to leave your comrades here in the trenches? Don't you wish to help them?'

They kept silent.

'What would happen if they were all to do the same as you? Still silence.'

'Don't you see that the victory of the fascists here will rebound on your province? Don't you understand that if we beat the fascists here, we are also beating them there? Or do you think that your village is going to keep the advantages it has gained from the Republic if the Republic is crushed?'

They admitted that I was right, but still they wished to go.

'Then', I said, 'you aren't comrades, you are nothing. You are traitors!'

'That we are not,' some of them replied, deeply hurt.

'You are traitors, and we don't want you here. Get off with

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you! But before you get to your village a message from the Central Barracks will have reached your mayor and the Popular Front Committee, telling what has happened. They will know that you don't deserve to be treated like comrades.'

I didn't expect to do it, but I was trying to put before them the real nature of their behaviour.

'Now then,' I said, 'lay down your rifles. They are not for you; they are for men.'

They put them down on the ground, one after the other.

'You can go off.'

All waited. They wished a safe-conduct to let them return to Madrid.

'I can only give you a safe-conduct telling the truth; that you are cowards.'

'Then', said one of them, 'it will be better if you don't give us one.'

But they didn't go. At last one of them began to walk off, and two others followed him. But at that moment two of the militia came to me:

'Don't let them go off like that, captain. They must leave their overcoats; they must leave their blankets. They must leave here everything that they have got from the militia, because it will all come in very handy for the comrades who are fighting.'

'You hear these two comrades? Come now, look lively!'

They left all the equipment they had, without answering back. I was indignant. They were willing to give up everything if only they could go off. The two militiamen taunted them:

'The Moors will reach your village to-morrow, they will sack your houses, rape your sisters and your daughters. And your blood isn't boiling in your veins? Cowards!'

The fifteen militia listened to them impassively. I remembered the peasants of my own district. To avoid even a single one of the words which had been said to them they would have died in the trenches a hundred times. To punish anyone who would have ventured to speak like that to them they would have fought with an enemy ten times stronger. And these fifteen men had endured it all passively, simply to get

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away! The two militia continued insulting them. I thought that it was a clear case of cowardice and of disgrace, but next I asked them, pretending to be more cordial:

‘Have you any grievance against the chiefs, against me? Tell me frankly.’

They disclaimed that with protests. It was exactly because of them that they had come back, they declared, because after they had left Toledo, where they lost all their officers, they were all determined to retire.

‘Then’, I concluded, ‘the fact is that you have no reason for going off, and yet you are going off. That means that you are afraid, and as all this, the trenches, the rifle, are not for cowards you are doing quite right in going away. Off with you!’

I went off myself. Very soon I heard them moving away. I realized after all that the campaign had been very hard. They had been two months in the front line without relief. They had been almost without food. Until I came, they were going about half clothed. I understood everything, except one thing; why they were going off. That made a bad impression on me.

One of them came back.

‘How are we going through the control gates on the roads?’

I shrugged my shoulders, and said that if they were fired at they would have to put up with it. I would not give them any kind of safe-conduct. That was perhaps a little irregular, but the regular thing would have been to shoot them.

I felt such incidents more than most of the others. León might simply have told them:

‘Get out of my sight if you don’t wish me to fire a few bullets at you.’

But I understood why they were unwilling to remain (I knew that in a way they could not accept the new conditions of service), but everything had to be faced. It wasn’t a question of much worse or better food, or of more or less cold; it was simply that one had to kill or be killed. I realized that they were all ready for that from the moment they had come to me. But the little troubles repeated from day to day, shortness of food becoming the rule, the cold, and the unbearable emptiness of the long hours at the parapets. That was the

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worst. The general attitude to it all was, 'It can't be done, but it must be done.' They could not reach that conclusion. Their lack of political education made it impossible.

A motor-cyclist came bumping over the kind of road we had made by continued walking over the ploughed fields. Before arriving he announced himself with his horn, and stopped. I went down. León called to me. My comrade and chief had established a staff office a few hundred yards behind the railway bridge, in a culvert which passed through the embankment. There had been no rain for days and it was dry. Its vaulted stone roof would resist the largest shells. You had to crawl into it on all fours, but inside you were as snug as a mole in its nest. I thought at once that every three or four days when I could no longer keep awake, I'd go down there to sleep, and expected to sleep very well. There were three motor-cyclists at the entrance to the tunnel. León stood up and said:

'We are going to Olias for a conference with the commanding officer.'

We all got on motor-cycles. After reaching the road we soon got to Olias, although we could go only very slowly with our lights extinguished. Olias was the general headquarters of our left wing, and Colonel Mena, in command of the whole sector, was there. They were much better installed at Olias. It was a big town with mansions abandoned by the large landowners and requisitioned for military and political purposes. The staff office was in a house at the entrance to the town. A high clearing in front of it protected it from the enemy artillery, but as it was the only house in the town placed so favourably, it was probable that it would be an attractive target for the enemy aviation, as they would assume that it was occupied for some important purpose. Our own aeroplanes had been over Olias that afternoon, and had dropped two bombs by mistake, one very close to headquarters. But they recognized their mistake in time, and, in compensation, went over Bargas, discharging all their load very effectively, and then flew low down, with great daring, to machine-gun the fascist observation posts and trenches for about an hour.

When we were with the lieutenant-colonel, a man of sixty

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years, an Andalucian, austere and dry, but very kindly, who *was in his pyjamas day and night and had his moustache burnt by cigarettes*, he said to my comrade:

‘Listen, León. We are attacking to-morrow.’

He looked at us fixedly. As he saw that we were only waiting for instructions, he hunted among his papers for some typed sheets. He had difficulty in finding them, asked an assistant if there were copies, and on being told that there were gave them to us.

We read them. It was an order for the next day. Colonel Mena said to León:

‘Repeat it to me. I want to know that you have understood.’

The old man among his plans had the appearance of a retired functionary over his card game in a café. He made a pleasant impression. It was only the second time that I had seen him, but he remembered my name perfectly, the company which I commanded, and the sector in which it was placed. He gave the impression of being muddle-headed, but he proved to be alert-minded even with regard to the smallest details. He knew how many cars there were in the garages, how many grenades each of the batteries still had, the surplus zinc sheets in the storehouse, and the days for which this or the other officer had not enjoyed leave. It was unnecessary to explain things to him, for as soon as a subject was mentioned, he himself began to explain it—moreover, with great precision. I was delighted. It was the first time I had come on a high officer who did not seem half asleep, indolent. Mena devoted himself to all his work joyfully, and even in the moments when the work was most heavy he had a lively and hurried but quite natural air. He was an excellent chief, and every one was very fond of him. Some days before, the enemy had smashed one of our 10·5 guns which, with three others, was emplaced just outside Olias. The lieutenant was killed; a youth who had always shown very high courage. When that was reported to him, the colonel hurriedly threw a jacket over his pyjamas, went out, and arrived at the battery. Some officers begged him to wait until the aeroplanes had gone away, but, in the middle of the bombardment, he went himself to the

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battery, ascertained all that had happened, gave the necessary orders and came back lamenting:

‘Poor boy! the poor boy!’

Explosions began in series all round about us. The house which the general staff was occupying was large, but rickety and fragile. Some of the walls were gaping because of the vibrations of the explosions. The colonel didn’t seem to take notice of all that. Sometimes he leaned against the glass windows, and as new explosions were heard he asked in wonder:

‘Are these beasts carrying heavier loads now?’

León repeated the general outlines of the order. Then he asked:

‘But isn’t this copy for me?’

‘Yes, but it doesn’t matter. I wished to see if you had grasped the thing at your first glance. Last night the enemy placed more than forty lorries in Bargas. We can’t suppose that they are to carry sweets. We must attack. How are your men?’

‘Very good; ready for anything.’

‘Which are the starting-points?’

‘Those that you know. But we could improve them to-night, couldn’t we?’

In saying that he looked at me. I agreed, and the colonel turned to me:

‘What do you think could be done to improve these starting-places?’

‘Move two or three companies along the railway line to Bargas station, and concentrate more force in the olive plantations, but for that we should want more artillery and more machine-guns.’

‘Excellent. But never mind the olive groves. The station is more important. The attack cannot start from the olive plantations until the forces from the station have surrounded the town on the side away from our front, from the back, is it not so? They will have to attack the cemetery. But they must not launch their attack until you see the red flag on the hill between Olias and Bargas, eh?’

‘Agreed.’

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'To-night two machine-gun sections will come to you, also two 10·5 guns and a battery of 7·5 which is already at the level crossing. Collect all these and place them. Take precautions when you are placing them, as we must not open any new road or attract the enemy fire on Cabañas station, don't you see?'

Then León explained to the colonel his plan of work for the night. We should go to reconnoitre the ground on which the attack would have to be developed. He mentioned which forces would go, and their position. Mena approved of everything except the part assigned to a battalion of anarchists, in which he had no confidence.

'Individually the C.N.T. people are excellent,' he said, 'but when they are collected in units they serve for nothing but to upset the other troops.'

As we were going out he called to León, for whose military capacity he had a real admiration, which I shared:

'What were you when you did your military service?'

León laughed with the sincerity of a child:

'Second artillery man.'

It was the lowest he could be, and Mena was disappointed.

When we left, León said to me:

'If he only knew that the most of my military service I passed in the cells!'

We spent the night reviewing the front lines. We warned the advanced posts on the railway line not to fire, and pushed on into 'No Man's Land'. Two officers came with us. One of them was Galan, an excellent fellow, now dead. We walked separately and spoke only under our breath. The enemy might be anywhere, to our right or in front, thirty or three yards off. Field-glasses bring shadows nearer at night as they do images by day. It was very risky to walk there, but we had a sloping bank on each side on which we might protect ourselves if we were attacked. The enemy had no regular trenches there. Possibly he might have a nest of machine-guns in one of the well-pits close at hand, or an observation post, but certainly they could not see us ten yards off. We knew the area rather well, and we satisfied ourselves about the railway line as the concentration basis for the troops which were to deploy

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behind the town under the protection of the artillery. To secure that starting point it was necessary to cross a zone at least a mile and a half wide swept by the enemy's light artillery. That would have to be done before dawn.

Nothing happened. But as we were returning we lit a pocket torch to confirm our position on the map, and six or seven shots from a machine-gun were fired. León turned quickly towards the place from which the bullets had come. They had been passing overhead.

'Oh! the bitch!' meaning the machine-gun, 'so there you are!'

We calculated that the machine-gun was in an angle of the road from the station to the town.

'That machine-gun my people will blow up,' said Mohíno, captain of a battalion of Andalusian militia.

We went back and entered the olive plantations. On moonlight nights walking amongst the olives produced an almost religious sensation. Through the silence trickled the little noises of the night. The olives were all very much alike with their black trunks, their pruned heads, the little circles round their roots, and their positions at equal distances in long, parallel rows. The ground, freed from herbage, was so hard that we seemed to be walking on tiles. We felt as if indoors, and even our voices echoed as if in an empty house. Sometimes there were very hard irregularities like lunar landscapes, in high relief. In the darkness our feet were being knocked to pieces on them. Isolated shots from the advanced posts sounded through the olives, the echoes rebounding like a hard ball.

We reached our outposts. We found one of our sentinels asleep, within a quarter of a mile of the enemy posts. León gave him a kick, but the sentinel only drew in his leg and gave a sigh of satisfaction. Then León arranged to frighten him. He drew his revolver, placed it close to the sentinel's ear, and fired into the air. In case the enemy should reply, we huddled behind the parapet. They did reply with a few rifle shots. The sentinel sat up, rubbed his ear, and opened his eyes widely at seeing four of us there. He didn't seem to be very surprised by the shots.

'And so you were asleep, eh?' said León to him.

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'Good lord! Anyone may take a little bit of a snooze.'

León swore that until then the Galician comrades were the only ones he knew to sleep at the parapets. He made him understand the risk of going to sleep within a quarter of a mile of the enemy's lines, and then we went off. We heard him grumbling in Andaluz:

'If they would give us bread instead of frights!'

We all agreed that there was a good deal in what he said, and we went on, holding back our laughter. Less than half a mile lower down, we heard voices near the railway line. We stopped to listen. One of our sentinels was speaking from his post, doubtless calling to the enemy soldiers:

'Comrades!'

We crept closer to him and listened. No one replied. Then from a little distance in front another voice was heard.

Our sentinel asked:

'Who are you?'

They replied boastingly in nearly the following words:

'Don Juan de Alvar y Yañez Cortadillo de la Gomera, viscount of Casa Pascual.'

'I wasn't calling to you, but I am glad to know you.'

'Why?'

'To open the belly of your bitch of a mother.'

They replied with a rattle of machine-guns.

We saw the captains of every company in each sector. They had received directions for next day. All had taken them in the most optimistic and spirited way. Everyone had something intelligent of his own to add. It was interesting to ascertain that the enemy had fixed defences only in one sector, towards Olias, and in a small part of the olive plantations. Elsewhere were only posts of observation and isolated sentries. They had some trenches towards the end of the olive plantations. The rest of their forces must have been mechanized columns with motor-cars and cavalry, within the town or towards the rear-guard.

It was nearly three in the morning when we considered the first part of our work finished. We went back to the culvert. A machine-gun lieutenant and an artillery corporal were waiting for us. They reported to León. He told the one where to place

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the guns and the other where to find the machine-guns which were to open the attack, and the exact spots where they must be placed. As he didn't know the ground, I went back with him to the starting-point and beyond it almost to the emplacement. The lieutenant was a professional soldier and had a somewhat dry and reserved air. He came to our operation rather in the spirit of an opera star asked to sing in a third-rate theatre. But it was easy to see that it was not so much a question of vanity as of lack of enthusiasm.

The artillery second-lieutenant was a man of about fifty years, intelligent looking, and seeming to be very loyal. He made an excellent impression on us.

We returned to the staff office, and when the artillery officer and the lieutenant went off to carry out their duties—the artillery officer had to open fire on Bargas exactly at six o'clock in the morning—I went into the culvert. It was half-past three. I was getting ready to sleep when León lighted his pocket lamp:

'If you agree,' he said, 'we'll go over the plan again.'

He pulled it out. We had to send more definite instructions to the two 10·5 guns and to the battery of 7·5. These instructions had to be studied beforehand. I was dead tired. I asked from time to time:

'My company; what is it to do?'

I wished something brilliant for my soldiers. León said to me almost angrily:

'You have distributed the forces of the other battalions, and you ask me to place yours.'

I told him that naturally I didn't wish to decide their fate. I was too fond of my comrades.

'All right.' He understood. 'That is another matter. Your company can stay in reserve between the station and signal-box. Does that suit you?'

I rejected the plan.

- 'Don't bottle them up, León. Are we to stand there with our arms folded, receiving sacrament from the artillery and the aeroplanes?'

'All right. Say what you want.'

'They could be the right wing of Leal's battalion, don't you think?'

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León seemed dubious. Leal's battalion was going to attack the cemetery of Bargas. The right wing was to be prepared to make a surprise attack whilst the rest of the battalion, attacking from the front, would receive the first shock. León agreed, but presently asked me:

'Do you intend to command your company yourself?'

'Of course!'

León insisted that we must not separate, he and I, during the operation.

'That is the decision of the colonel, not mine.'

After a long discussion we arranged that the company was to be in reserve, but actually in the line, ready to cover the retreat. I did not wish to leave them in that line of death where all the shells from the guns and the bombs from the aeroplanes fall, where there is plenty of blood but neither pleasure nor laurels.

That night it became necessary to go back to see where the machine-guns were, because we were told that they had been left at the first bridge. León, as he wasn't quite sure, came with me. It was so. We made the lieutenant advance his machines nearly a quarter of a mile beyond the agreed point. I told him that if daylight came before the forces deployed he would be protected by a clump of trees.

'And if in spite of that they see me?' he asked.

'If they see you', we said, 'they will fire on you, but that always happens in war. It may happen that they kill you, or that they don't kill you. But you must be here to attend to the placing of the machine-guns at the exact time and spot where they are required.'

On our return we stopped at the second railway bridge which crossed the railway. It was of reinforced concrete and two roads joined on it above the deep trench, in the bottom of which the railroad passed. A strange incident happened to us. When we reached the bridge we called out to Mohíno, who ought to have been under it. Mohíno asked: 'Who are you?' As we told our names, a rifle shot rang out and the bullet flattened itself at a handsbreadth from us against one of the pillars of the bridge.

We descended, letting ourselves slip down the slope until we were on the line itself:

'Who fired?'

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In the dark it was difficult to be sure. At last we ascertained that it had been a sentinel on the other side of the bridge. We withdrew him and questioned him. His face was the best accusation. In cross-examination, we discovered that he was neither a peasant nor a workman nor an employee. He looked like a cheap-jack or a fancy-man, cowardly and furtive. He had the typical appearance of a traitor, sly and shifty. A hypocrite and a coward when in danger.

'My rifle went off by mistake.'

We couldn't shift him from that story. We climbed up with him to the post on which he had been. For the bullet to have struck where it did, it would have had to be in an abnormal position and to be directly aimed at us. But as we could not move him from his assertion (the rifle went off by mistake), and as on the other hand he was without political or social guarantees except his C.N.T. ticket, which stated only that when the war had broken out he had hurried to shelter himself in their syndicates (his ticket was one of Various Duties dated in August 1936), we agreed that next day he should go in front with the first guerillas who were to attack, but without arms. The best proof of his culpability was his own terror. If the rifle of a loyal militiaman had been fired in error, he would have come to us of his own accord, and, instead of accusing him, we should have had to calm him and free him from blame.

We descended to the staff office with an uncomfortable impression. León was annoyed by the machine-gun lieutenant's reserved manner—partly timid and partly insolent.

'What is wrong with that blighter?' he asked.

'What do you expect him to do? He finds himself under the orders of a commander who doesn't dress well, who has not come from an academy, who does not belong to a good family, and who none the less treats him with haughtiness and contempt. All that is incomprehensible to him, and so he feels himself out of place here. But, to-morrow, leave him to me.'

León laughed.

'What are you going to do?'

'That depends on how the operation goes.'

He went off laughing, satisfied.

It was half-past four in the morning. There was no longer

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time to sleep. A motor-cycle took me to the artillery field. We agreed that at half-past six they should open fire on the church tower of Bargas. That would be the signal for beginning to deploy. As we had no telephone we had to arrange almost everything beforehand. And so if there were no counter-orders, which if necessary were to be sent by a messenger, there were to be fifty shots on the church tower.

‘On the tower itself?’

‘Yes. It would be excellent if you could land a shot exactly on the belfry.’

The enemy would consider it the ordinary cannonade from our positions, and would reply to it with their guns in the ordinary way. But if we were to make observations from the tower difficult, or to succeed in destroying it we should have gained a great advantage. Our surprise attacks on their lines would be constant. We agreed that after fifty shots we should wait exactly half an hour and then send a hundred shots across to the back of the town. We might happen to break their telephone system or their transport, but in any case we should disconcert them and impede their concentration of troops. At the same time the light battery was to open a crushing fire on the two trenches which the enemy had made at the exit from the town. Lastly, unless there were an order to the contrary one of the guns was to fire on the cemetery (the first shot not before nine o’clock) and the other was to go on attacking the church. Only twenty shots were to be fired on the cemetery. After half-past nine they would get further instructions.

He took note of all that. Afterwards I went to the light guns, and returned to the culvert remembering that the colonel had offered us the help of an armoured train, and hoping that our aviation would arrive at seven o’clock. In that case the light artillery would have the duty of indicating the objectives by firing on definite points already marked on the map. It was almost time to begin. The sky was already lightening.

Just as I was getting ready a pad to write the first order for the chief of the armoured train, we heard gun-fire, and a shell burst on the other side of the culvert. León and I stared at each other. We crept out on all fours and climbed to the top of the embankment. Other shells followed the first. They were fir-

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ing from outside Bargas on a little white house two hundred and fifty yards from the railway, and the shots were very accurate. Smoke enveloped it completely. They smashed the roof with three shots. We continued to stare. I thought, rather in perturbation, that once again an attack of ours opened with fire from the enemy's artillery.

They must have suspected something odd in our camp, but they could not be definite about it. The shells kept falling on the little house, every minute with greater frequency.

'There is nothing there, is there?'

'No.'

It was a very white little house, with a red roof, in two blocks. By sending a motor-cyclist to the light battery, we were able to ascertain that two cars had gone to that house seeking emplacements for another battery. The enemy had seen the cars come out on their way back, and perhaps thought that the general staff was there. They fired more than a hundred rounds on it, which luckily were shells wasted for the day. Our three motor-cycles had the engines running. A few seconds before hearing our first cannon shots we went up on the railway. We were stiff with cold. We found that the supply of bowls of coffee which they had promised us had not arrived. We had not told the comrades about them before, to prevent disappointment.

A dozen or more militia without arms crossed our path and made us stop. I did not recognize them.

'Don't you remember, captain? We are those who wished to go off last night.'

'All right. What about it? I have no time to waste.'

At that moment the Bargas artillery, upset and afraid, fired on the railway in front of us. The trolley with the jars of coffee was coming up, and they wished to stop it. The soldiers who were in it pressed the levers violently, and the trolley passed like smoke. The soldiers raised their clenched fists in salutation as they passed. The fifteen militia replied resolutely to our questions—

'We don't wish to go off,' they said.

I asked them indignantly if they thought they were in a children's game. They answered, every one trying to speak at once. Finally three, and then two, and then the one who had

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addressed me first, spoke. They had found out that we were going to attack, and wished to join in the assault with us. 'But you must see', I pointed to the nearest explosions, 'that we are going to have great activity to-day.'

'What more do we want,' he answered. 'It is going to be a good chance of killing fascists, and that is the only thing we want.' 'And if we are killed,' added another, 'bad luck.' I had them armed. They were not to go with the company, but were to form a front squad.

'Yes, sir,' they shouted enthusiastically, 'we'll go anywhere.' I asked if they accepted me as chief, and they all agreed. I told them that they were to advance along the railway line, and wait behind the second signal-box, where they would be told what to do. They went off contented and singing.

I was struck by the fact that although I had called them cowards and traitors the day before—words that usually would have led to blows—they had all forgotten about it. The fact that they bore me no malice I interpreted as implying that they considered me not only as their chief, but as a comrade and brother. As a rule they would not have tolerated such insults from a professional leader, or from a militia officer who seemed bourgeois. They received them impassively when the speaker was a proletarian or a real peasant, without pretence, like themselves. In other cases, the slightest offence in speech or even in gesture would have aroused class feeling. When I saw that they were paying no attention to my words of the day before I felt that I must have brutalized myself, in physical appearance I mean, and had been suitably acclimatized for the war during the weeks at Guadarrama.

León was rather anxious:

'Won't they commit some sabotage, or desert to the enemy?'

When they speak from the heart, as these lads do, there are, no double meanings or secret intentions. I reminded him that I had understood their discouragement the night before, although I did not wish to admit it to them. To-day, also, I understood their enthusiasm. They were as much influenced by their will as I was. Some people can control it, others can not.

CHAPTER XVI

THE JOY OF ATTACKING

The fact that the coffee was sent half an hour after the appointed time was the beginning of disaster for the chief of the Service Corps. It disturbed the first stages of the operation so seriously that we all began to be anxious. Many half-frozen soldiers who had passed several weeks, and not a few of them, months, without a hot meal, hurried to bring their dishes and flasks. That slightly disarranged our starting movements. Our artillery had attained its first objectives completely, and we became impatient as we kept looking at our watches. We wished to be present at all the details and we had to be with the troops, but at intervals we realized the physical impossibility of that, and our impatience turned into a torturing anxiety. Two-thirds of the troops felt the same anxiety, fortunately, for they preferred to start whilst hungry rather than disarrange the plans of attack in the smallest detail. At the appointed time for deploying and advancing everyone was at his post. Faces which up to then had been unmoved became alive at the hope of fighting on our own initiative and not simply when obliged to do so by the attack of the enemy. From Olias our heavy artillery pounded all the positions at Bargas. The enemy, taken by surprise, whilst they tried to ascertain the extent of our attack, kept silence. Their guns were silent. It was a pause either to settle on a plan or proof of the efficiency of our guns, or both together. Under the early sunlight of dawn, so clean, dense clouds of dark grey smoke rose all round Bargas. Perhaps the enemy artillerymen were waiting in their caves or at the bottom of their trenches until the

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storm passed. León and I went round the points of departure on our motor-cycles, bumping over the tilled land. I told the lieutenant of machine-guns that when the guerillas of the Andalusian battalion had advanced five or six hundred yards, he was to move his machines to the extreme of our front, so dominating the enemy trenches, and to wait until the fascists should come out of them, to catch them under cross-fire. 'And if they don't come out?' he asked showing a certain reluctance to accept my orders. 'They must come out,' I insisted.

'But to reach the other flank we'll have to pass under their fire.'

I put my hand on the butt of my revolver in such a way that he might think, but without being quite sure, that it was not a threat but a movement without any intention. That was enough. He saluted and went off to obey the order. I sent after him a sergeant and thirty men, who, under the pretext of taking charge of the machines and protecting them in case of retreat, had special orders. He had asked me what was to be the place for re-forming, if they did not get special orders, and I told him that it would be the same as the starting-point. All operations were based on the railway line, which was to be the spinal column of the battle. For a long time I kept remembering the lieutenant's question, and rehearsing it again and again in my brain. 'What was his base?' His base? His base was the same as that of all of us, the ground on which we trod; and his moral base was the roll of his regiment. He had no other. That was the cause of the half-concealed contempt which he must have believed to be the reply to the scorn for himself which he supposed (although I never saw it) to be implied in the heroic disinterestedness of the militia.

My company had deployed along the trench of the railway towards Bargas station. Bodín, who could not keep still, came to meet me.

'A little above the station there is an abandoned dead body. It has been there for at least five days. We must recover it because some of the militia are saying that we abandon our dead, and that is demoralizing them.'

I hadn't seen it, but I asked him if the body had a dark coat. He told me that was so and added very confidently:

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'It is a fascist. We got his papers and took them to the commander. Tell them that it is our enemies who abandon their dead.'

We were not going to complicate our work with sentimental scruples. Shells were humming over our heads. The pieces of 10.5 were shooting very well. The old second lieutenant knew his job. When a professional officer was heartily on our side his efficiency was at once noticed. Fortunately soldiers loyal to the people were not few, as might be believed.

It must have been about eight o'clock. The sun had reached every recess of the olive plantations and of the plain corrugated in gentle curves. The Andalucian battalion advanced over open ground offering their breasts to the bullets. At last we began to hear the lieutenant's machine-guns. Those of the enemy had awakened more than half-an-hour before and were firing with fury. When we had passed the pumping stations on the left, and the railway station on the right, our right flank was exposed. We covered it with my company, pushing two advance pickets a quarter of a mile farther on. One of them was formed by a squad of those who had wished to go off the night before. It offered a chance of retrieving their reputation, and I was sure that if it came they would take it. An old militiaman asked leave to go with them; he was grey-haired, and arrived with three others from Madrid a few days before. He was a bookbinder and his hair had the colour of the tufts of fibre found in books when the back has come undone. The old man, who never joined in the chattering and discussions of the young ones, marched off very contentedly. I finished inspecting the sectors and then returned to the white ticket office near my company. At night we had shivered with cold. Although it was scarcely an hour and a half since I was shivering by the side of my motor-cycle, at the moment, under the early sun, going up and down wrapped in my greatcoat, I was perspiring.

I went to find León. I found him completing the sanitary arrangements. In the space under the second railway bridge they had installed a first-aid station with a doctor, two assistants and an old nurse. Two dozen orderlies were setting up beds.

'All going well?' I asked León.

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‘Yes. We are now in contact with them, but we are advancing.’ Everyone had shown so much understanding and goodwill that not the slightest hitch had occurred. They left the points of sally and advanced without any hesitation. Co-ordination was complete. I reminded León what the colonel had told us about the attack on the town. It was not to be pushed until we saw the red flag on the hill. We settled ourselves on a neighbouring height and followed the advance with our field-glasses. Whilst I watched the general development of the operation, León waited to see the red flag on the summit. We had three very active militiamen beside us ready to take the order for the attack at any moment. Far off the militia advanced slowly but firmly at a steady pace, with rifles at the ready. Now and again a storm of machine-gun bullets fell on them, but they went on unhesitatingly. The enemy had been surprised and had been unable to change the position of their machine-guns as the shrapnel from our light batteries immobilized them. The shooting of their machine-guns must have been wild, except in the sector of the railway station, where in the angle of the approach road there was a nest of machine-guns well placed. But there there was little to do because the Andalucians and Leal’s battalion were supporting our attack and had deployed much farther back and were approaching the town from the back.

Until that moment I felt that two important factors were almost wholly in our favour. At least one: surprise. The other, space, was still against us but we were gradually dominating it. The guerilla bands were slowly moving towards the enemy positions. Space, which in all the events of civil life is only a passive obstacle, is only distance, in the war was an active obstacle which tried not only to hold us back but to absorb us. In our childhood, and later, it held constant temptations and menaces, and if we overcame them, it was laboriously, step by step, with our sweat and our blood. We were not without a sense of manœuvre, but we could not employ it, because for manœuvre in war factors are needed which conquer time and move in space—armoured cars which increase the speed of soldiers and make elastic distances which for us had a devastating rigidity; and aeroplanes which can pro-

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duce insecurity in the enemy's rearguard, and which conquer space by sending down into the hostile trenches their machine-gun bullets.

Distance remained rigid, barren for us, and kept back our soldiers, who were carrying out their task laboriously. León had an instinct for manœuvres and perhaps I should not have been a bad assistant, but we had not the machines, the arms of manœuvre. So far from being able to conquer the space which was devouring our soldiers, time and distance would beat us if we met the smallest obstacle. These reflections were not opportunist. They were within the most scrupulous realism and by no means came from imagination.

At a quarter to nine, seeing our guerillas fixing their bayonets at a few hundred yards from the cemetery, León thumped his knee with his fist:

'At what time are our 10·5 guns to open fire on the cemetery?'

'At nine o'clock.'

He feared lest at the pace at which our men were advancing they would reach the cemetery when the first shell was falling. And thus it might happen that with our own battery we should kill some comrades of Leal's battalion.

I was far from sharing his fear, although I regretted not to have told these forces that they must wait for the first twenty cannon shots before assaulting the cemetery. But in that, as in everything, I trusted to chance as I have often done, with success. The enemy artillery began to show signs of life, and every minute its fire increased. It fired in an exploring way, in all directions. The machine-guns also were attacking our guerillas. All the ground within our vision was dominated by us. Here and there the soil rose in whirls of dust and smoke. Our militia—how small they looked on the plain!—were advancing, had captured the great part of 'No-man's-land' and were still going forward. Moreover they were maintaining their symmetry. It seemed to be simply an army review. The guerillas going against the cemetery stopped. The mortars of the enemy threw into the air their sheets of metal, among the attackers. The machine-guns in the cemetery also began to fire. The stiffest part of the defence had been reached. We hoped in vain for the armoured train. I turned my field-

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glasses from time to time towards Madrid, hoping to see one of our aeroplanes in the sky. If in the next half-hour the train and a few aeroplanes had arrived, we should have destroyed the enemy. But they did not arrive. León said to me:

‘I am glad that they have stopped Leal’s battalion for that will give time to the artillery.’

It was true, and once again I saw chance acting in our favour. It was two minutes to nine. The enemy could not fail to be impressed by the quickness and punctuality with which our artillery came to the help of the guerillas, held back two minutes before by the mortars and machine-guns in the cemetery. Our first shell passed over our heads exactly at nine o’clock. It fell inside the cemetery. At the same moment the red flag appeared on the hill in front of Olias. Our three scouts went off like arrows. The enemy artillery was engaged in bombarding the railway line, although we had no longer a single man on it. Two 7·5 shells fell within a dozen yards of us, one on the spot which the scouts had just left. I rose up, surprised by the perfect co-ordination of all the steps we had just taken. The twenty shots fell one after the other at intervals, the longer the better, so that our scouts would have more time to arrive. Not a single shot missed. The guerillas launched their attack with bayonets unsheathed. They had to take cover on the ground twice again. At last they surrounded the cemetery. They threw hand-grenades into it without getting any reply. The cemetery had probably been abandoned. It was our first success of the day. I hoped that they would not enter it, but would shelter themselves under its walls until the mass of the enemy had been beaten in front. Then, an hour later, they could fall on the flank in a torrent. I sent a motor-cyclist to Olias to report to the colonel that the first of the objectives had been attained.

But neither the train nor our aeroplanes arrived. These two elements would have given us victory within an hour. And it would have been an easy and a complete victory. The guerillas did not enter the cemetery. They took shelter under its walls and waited. The fascist light artillery and mortars began to hammer on the cemetery. That was to be expected. But inside the cemetery there were only coffins and bodies.

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The country was presenting to our guerillas its splendid serenity, and on it, as on a green and bright grey sheet, the brave soldiers of the Republic were writing a glorious page. There were peasants, workers, artisans; Smith and Jones, the fruit seller, the onion picker, the high master of the cesspools of Madrid, and the first-born of the ticket collector of tramway No. C. 22, putting to flight, by their intelligence and their impetus, the elegant gentlemen of Santiago, the masters of Alcantara, the well-born scions of Gonzalo de Córdoba, educated in the best academies, with the best armaments, advised by the most learned soldiers of 'immortal Germany' and 'invincible Italy'.

But apropos of the gentlemen of Alcantara, the Moorish cavalry appeared on our right flank. Not the Spanish gentlemen, for these were late from murdering chains of manacled prisoners in the prisons. The courage of their ancestors, which was the same courage as that of the people who accompanied them, and had gradually degenerated until in their grandchildren there was left only cruelty, the courage of the weak and cowardly. The Moorish cavalry appeared on our right flank, more than four miles off. As it seemed that they had not decided to attack, but were waiting until detached patrols should tell them how the land lay, I thought that it would give us time, and I sent a scout giving directions to the machine-guns. From where these were, if they waited till the Moors came near, they could do good work. Another messenger went to the light batteries, calling their attention to that sector. When ten minutes had passed without any movement on the part of the Moors, I breathed freely, now sure that they could not take us by surprise. I went down to warn my company, which was covering that flank. One of the machine-guns passed to the attack on the left. As its owner did not wish to let it go, he went himself. The other, in the centre, in the line. The attack, if it came, would be on the right and the fire from our automatic guns would take them in the flank. Bodín went about distributing hand-grenades. The light guns of the enemy gave warning of the attack by opening fire on my company, which covered nearly half a mile and was in touch with the other three companies based on Cerro Mariel.

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The Moorish cavalry were coming up slowly. The cloud of dust they raised was impressive. It seemed as if the hosts of a Roman emperor were arriving. 'Victorious Franco!' When they were within range of our artillery they charged. Our light battery fired rounds of shrapnel which exploded in the air, about the level of the saddles. About a third retreated decimated. The others advanced in disorder. They had mounted mortars and among them we saw two machine-gun tanks which swept our lines. They were firing heavy shells from Bargas on our light battery. It was clear that they had put all their faith in that counter-attack. We sent a signal along our lines:

'No one must leave his position, either to advance or to retire.'

We had not a single loss. In spite of the enemy's shells our artillery continued to fire well. Close up, the machine-guns covered the free spaces between the shells. The two magazine rifles were also firing. The Moors broke up and fled downwards leaving more than a dozen horses and riders on the ground. But the tanks, two of them, small, with endless chains, carrying machine-guns and light cannon, continued their advance. I did not think that our Castillo bombs with fuses would be very effective, but we had no others. The group of fifteen doubtful men had an opportunity for heroism. They were concealed behind a mound which separated two farms, with a difference in level of six or seven feet. One of the tanks went towards them. The other seemed more concerned about the fate of the cavalry, which had galloped off more to the right (the comrades from Cerro Mariel were attending to them). Two of the fifteen men crept out and threw three or four bombs on the tank. One of them was the taciturn old man with grey hair. In spite of their apparent lightness, the bombs did their work well. The tank became enveloped in dust and smoke, and its three occupants must have taken the chance of leaving it, for when the smoke disappeared we found the door open, and saw about fifty yards away two men running, and a third on the ground. Our magazine rifles pursued them and brought down another. At that moment all the Cerro Mariel was crackling. The rifles received the horses

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and their riders valorously. The firing was slackening, becoming reduced more and more, and finally stopped to leave silence on all the right flank. The counter-attack had lasted more than half an hour and had cost them a tank, some fifteen men, and about as many horses. They retreated. It wasn't an attack intended to be pushed, but perhaps only the simple reaction of those who were there. One of the fifteen of the left outpost died, and another was wounded in the shoulder, but was able to walk away. But they were all filled with a delirious pride, and Bodín had much difficulty and had to pull out his revolver, cursing them in the most friendly way, to keep them from leaving their posts to go out after the cavalry.

The grey-haired old man came back with a bomb in his hand. With the other he slapped his chest, gazed at his comrades and laughed. He kept telling them he was the man who had destroyed the tank.

He sat down behind the line with Bodín, and buried his head in his hands. Bodín stared at him in amazement:

'What is the matter with you, pioneer?'

The 'pioneer' felt the need of someone talking to him, and these words set him off. He rose up, very excited, and in a strained voice—perhaps he had been weeping, although I did not see him—waved his arms and shouted:

'Now I can die! Now I can die contentedly!'

León came up, so moved that he could hardly speak. It was a surprise to me to see him in that state, as I had always thought of him as a stern man, far from being excitable, but cold and impassive. His character was dynamically cold.

'That company has saved us,' he told me. 'If it had not stiffened us, we should all have been in the bloody soup.'

'Wait, wait,' I said to him, 'it isn't over yet!'

-- León began to laugh. His open laughter in low notes showed great confidence.

'What is still to be done to-day is nothing much.'

'What do you mean?' I asked, surprised.

León insisted:

'The reports from the sector. That is all we have to do.'

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‘And all these?’

I pointed to our forces scattered over the country. Batteries firing. Machine-guns shooting savagely. León said:

‘I am certain because of my experience. Perhaps you know more about a war of positions, but of this kind of thing—I have seen it at Talavera, at Toledo, at Santa Olalla, at the famous kilometre 98, and I can tell you that we have won.’

I had the same impression myself, but I reminded him:

‘I remember that in our attacks all goes well in the morning, but the afternoons belong to them.’

All the same I felt that we had done the greater part of our task. We had beaten the hateful space from which we had to flee in the war, as a fly has to escape from a spider’s web, always to fly from it, although the advantage it gave to the enemy was only temporary. We had possessed ourselves of these fields of stubble, of these deserted fields sometimes green, some sienna. They had yielded to the heavy boots of our militia, placed on them honourably, alas! too honourably, without looking back to see the blood that they had shed. Space had now lost all its inelasticity. On one side we had reached the cemetery. The enemy could no longer count on a rigid distance, a space which separated, but had to reckon on a shifting bridge which could disconcert and deceive the most expert. Now that the rigidity of space had been broken, it was possible to try some little manœuvring.

‘If only we had a couple of aeroplanes and three or four tanks!’

León preferred to imagine that he was strong enough to make it unnecessary to mourn over his disadvantages.

‘If we had, if we had! If we had everything there would be no difficulty in winning. The real matter is to succeed with what we have.’

As I knew that he thought differently and was speaking only to keep himself from pessimism, I didn’t reply. I didn’t, even remind him that the armoured train had shown no signs of its existence. And the presence of the armoured train would have increased prodigiously our power of manœuvre. But, taking one thing with another, space had not drunk us up. We had conquered it. Again I tried to water León’s heady

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wine of optimism by saying again that generally the 'afternoons belonged to the enemy'.

León shrugged his shoulders.

'It is true,' he said, as if something with which he had not been reckoning had to be considered, 'but however that may be, the worst that can happen to us is to return in good order to our first positions.'

CHAPTER XVII

FOREIGN AEROPLANES

The first aeroplanes arrived—but they were not ours. Two squadrons of bombers appeared over Bargas. They were trimotors. They had hardly come over our lines when we saw three other squadrons arriving from the same quarter. They were all Junker trimotors. Behind and high above them twenty-three ‘chasers’. We had conquered superficial space and time; they brought into play a game in three dimensions. The enemy artillery seemed to wake up. Our guerillas stood their ground, impassive. The troops in the cemetery had to retire, rank by rank, firing and taking shelter from the machine-guns of the ‘chasers’. They established themselves five hundred yards lower down, half hidden in the low scrub and under cover from the rifles of the cemetery, which had been reoccupied by the rebels. We followed all these movements with our mouths dry from anxiety. I didn’t wish to reproach León about his optimism. The aeroplanes made a wide circle round the area of battle. They began at the Olias front. They let fall half a ton of lead over our lines, and then went over the town. Bombs of a hundred and of two hundred pounds came one after the other. Soon a thick grey cloud rose over Olias, over the town itself. The aeroplanes followed the road until they reached the railway line. A cannon from Bargas directed them by firing a shell on our light batteries, and so indicating their position. As soon as it had exploded, the aeroplanes went directly over the place and discharged their load. The concussion reached us, shook the whole area of the battle. We watched anxiously through our field-glasses. The aeroplanes

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seemed, as they passed over, to sow desolation and death from the serenity of their altitude. Under the smoke there must be bloody ruins. One was obsessed by the aeroplanes. They were so beautiful that they must be right. And that reflection was a triumph of the enemy. The first triumph of the enemy in space.

A scout from my company brought the papers of the driver of the tank, who had been killed as he was trying to escape. He was an Italian. The machine was also Italian. Inside it were materials of war with marks of their Italian manufacture: Turin and Genoa. The aeroplanes which came over us were German. Their bombs were German. Prussians piloted them. And there were my brave comrades with nothing except their bravery and their rifles, small and exposed in the open plain, under the traitorous sky, on the wounded ground heaped up and smoking.

Lest the aviators should be in doubt, the enemy guns threw signalling shells on the places where troops were concentrated. As one of these fell at the foot of the little hill on which we stood, before the aeroplanes were vertically over us, we threw ourselves on the ground. That time the aeroplanes did not follow the indications of the artillery. León declared that before night that pimping traitorous gun would fall into our hands. I was doubtful. The aeroplanes did not destroy our guerillas and did not shatter our guns, but they made us feel unsafe.

The trimotors continued to circle, each time closer. They fired on our guerillas, on our machine-guns, on our posts of observation. The 'chasers' came low down and raked the places indicated by the enemy artillery. On their third circle they passed over my company. So far as it seemed, they all dropped all their load, and not one of our men was wounded by metal, but we had one man killed, his skull having been broken, like the windows in the town, by the violence of the explosive wave.

Our artillery resumed its firing when the aeroplanes left us. The light guns discharged a round of four shots to let us know that the battery was intact. The 10.5 fired two shots in succession to give the same information. The guns of the enemy were silent. Our guerillas rose up again and con-

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tinued their advance, but the first aeroplanes had hardly disappeared when seven other squadrons arrived. They also were trimotors and were escorted by a similar number of 'chasers'. Twenty-one trimotors. The inactivity to which the aeroplanes forced us was their real efficacy. An efficacy of space, as I said to myself again. Whilst they were there, no one fired, no one moved a foot. They were absolute masters of everything. They repeated the manœuvres of the first set, directed by the enemy artillery. They were over us nearly two hours. León, flat on the ground, went to sleep and snored, under the motors. Although surprising his snores comforted me. I looked towards the horizon, waiting for our own 'chasers'—but in vain. The aeroplanes sometimes came low down and spread their long shadows on the ground.

'If it weren't for you,' murmured the militia.

They clenched their teeth. I was watching in three directions. Towards Madrid, in the hope of seeing our planes. To the right, fearing that the Moorish cavalry would return. Towards Olias, to see if they would once more hoist the red flag, which they had taken down from the hill.

The aeroplanes did not go off until a quarter past four o'clock. While the offensive was being resumed, a motor-cyclist arrived from Olias with an order. It directed the retirement of all our forces to the positions from which they started. León, whom I awakened, tore his hair.

'Why are we to retire? Why?'

But the commander might have strong reasons. They sent dispatch riders with written orders. Our guns were not firing. Had they been destroyed by the aeroplanes? We had half an hour of anxiety. Our messengers started, passed through the olive-trees in concealment, crossed areas enfiladed by enemy machine-guns. I was waiting in front of the company, which altered its positions in case the enemy should attack from the front, as might be expected. The sun also was retreating, back towards the camp of the enemy. The top of Bargas tower and some of the Olias heights were bathed in a lovely golden glow.

The retreat began, and must have astonished the enemy, accustomed to the disorderly retreats of Morocco. Just as they

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advanced, the guerillas retired in perfect order, without hurry, at a walking pace, with their rifles under the right arm. Shrapnel kept exploding over them. The enemy maintained a furious and rapid fire. Under the little clouds which expanded with a dry explosion twenty to thirty yards from the ground, revealing their silvery interior in the half-light of the afternoon, the guerillas came back calmly and steadily with the automatic movements that come from weariness. All the cannon, all the machine-guns of the enemy fired vigorously, lest they should lose a minute during which who knows how many lives might be reaped. And our companies, our battalions retreated in the most surprising order and calmness. The retreat was perfect. They did not counter-attack, no doubt because they saw that all the forces kept their discipline, their touch with the officers, their steady movement.

We had much good fortune. I saw more than fifty shells explode over the heads of my men in a few minutes without any one of them quickening his steps and without a single loss. I said to León:

‘In Morocco a retreat like this would have won for you the royal cross and a step in rank.’

But León was indignant and had the right to be so. The officers also came back complaining aloud:

‘We had got the length almost of touching the enemy’s guns with our hands. Already they had three machine-guns dismounted ready to run off with them. It is a pity.’

When night fell, and the forces were back at their base, my company collected the machine-gun cartridges and projectiles which were in the tank, put a shell in it in the middle of the controls, exploded it, and began to retreat. They had remained behind all the others and passed through ‘No-man’s-land’ by night. The last of the enemy’s guns fired the last shots at us rather carelessly.

— Then the rumour became current among the militia that all Bargas had been mined, and that it would not have been worth while to capture it. I don’t know from where the story came, but it was substantial.

‘If it had been mined’, I said, ‘they would not have defended it so vigorously.’ On any hypothesis, I was very uncer-

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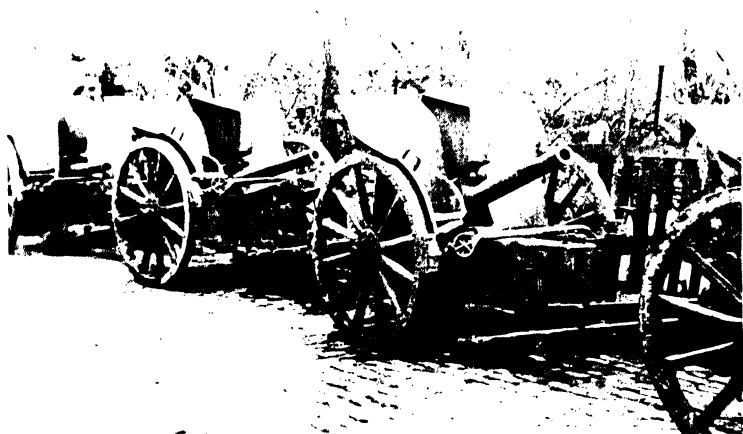
tain about the loyalty of Colonel Mena. But—the orders to attack and retreat might have come from higher up?

I slept very little that night. I was tortured by thinking of what we had not done, just as the night before by thinking of what we were going to do. But it was not only thinking of the actual fighting that preoccupied me. I had the impression that in spite of the thirty-six German trimotors, and the Italian tanks, victory had just fallen out of our hands. But why? Why?

I was already asleep when the information was brought to me that from somewhere behind our lines someone was communicating with the enemy by flash-lights. The usual traitor. I went out and convinced myself that from a mile or two behind us a light was flashing Morse signals. I was staggering on my feet with sleepiness, but León begged Bodín and me to get busy on the matter. Bodín mounted a motor-cycle and I took another. We went towards Cabañas, guided by the distant light. The damp cold of the night and the wind that we were facing made our eyes water, damping our cheeks with tears. We kept the light signals in sight. But the light seemed also to be running in front of us. We left the motor-cycles in the village, and walked towards the suburbs. The light flared up and disappeared. We saw that it was not on the side of a hill as Bodín had thought, mistaking a star for it and grumbling because there were so many stars in the sky, but below the top of the hill. If that were so, the signalling apparatus was quite near us. We sat down to wait until it should reappear. We had to wait a long time. The signals could not be seen from the village and the spy must have been quite secure in his hiding-place. When we realized that he must be on the part of the hill facing us we were delighted. The spy had been located in a sector of less than five hundred yards. Bodín went back to the village. He chose fifteen of the militia who were there in reserve, and a peasant who knew the country well came with them. The darkness of the night made the task much easier. The peasant looked at the star and said, scratching his head:

‘That must be at Anton’s.’

He meant in Anton’s farm. We went there, but not only found no one but lost sight of the signals. We went back



Italian Guns captured from the Rebels in the Guadalajara Section



Valencia: Italian Prisoners

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quickly to our observation post, and kept watching again. Almost at once the light began to flash again. The peasant was very surprised. 'Lights are very deceptive at night,' he said. We lost more than an hour waiting for directions from the peasant without any result. At last we decided to go in a straight line towards the light. 'We'll have to go through a stream,' said the peasant.

The peasant added that he was too old to get wet and kept telling us of the obstacles we should have to face. When we had crossed the stream we came on some fences over which we had to jump. Then a field of cut wheat; then the cemetery.

'What? The cemetery?'

'Yes.'

Bodín had a sudden inspiration:

'The apparatus is there.'

The peasant scratched his head again:

'Easy to see that the light is there,' and added 'The things which happen in the war!'

Then he asked:

'Will he be alone?' and replied himself. 'For if he is alone, he must have guts to walk about among the dead.'

Then he began to tell an amazing story about another peasant of Cabañas who had died one night in the cemetery gateway because of a bet, but no one listened to him. That 'dying for a bet' was extraordinary. Now we no longer doubted. We waded through the stream, in which there was hardly any water, and jumped the fences. We went on. The light sometimes disappeared, and then we would see it again. Bodín, panting, kept saying:

'He is not going to get away this time.'

But suddenly a dog began to bark and the light disappeared.

'Hurry! Go round the walls of the cemetery and see who comes out.'

The barking probably came from the cemetery itself. The fifteen men spread out round the walls. Bodín and I entered by the gate, made of iron and closed by a bolt which could be opened by putting the hand through the grating. A tall cypress towered amidst the tombs. In a corner a blue glow was

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flickering. Revolvers in hand, our eyes piercing the darkness, we went forward carefully. Wooden crosses, awry, seemed to be trying to stop us with wooden arms, half rotten with rain. Bodín took out a pocket torch and turned the light on the corner; there were only crosses, graves and a dried-up old wreath. Bodín hesitated:

‘Can he have escaped?’

No one was there. A low roof covered with moss and shepherd’s purse protected two rows of tombs from the rain.

Bodín said:

‘These are the elegant corpses, the ones who pay for their houses even after they are dead.’ A dark shape rose from the corner and came at us. When I felt it on me, I tried to step back, tripped over a grave-mound and fell. Bodín’s knife gleamed in his hand. There were howls and the shape crawled away. Bodín, gasping, said:

‘Where the dog is, there the master.’

He helped me to get up and went towards the niches, repeating ‘Where the dog is, there the master’. We heard two shots and more howling outside. Bodín kicked the stone of one of the tombs. A dull and deep echo sounded inside. The stone did not move. We then noticed that the slab of the adjoining tomb was loose, and only half supported. It fell to the ground as soon as we touched it. Inside we saw two stockingless feet in sandals, motionless.

‘Come out of that,’ we cried together.

A perfectly calm voice replied from within:

‘Don’t shoot; I am coming out.’

He came out. With his knees he dragged out pieces of a decayed coffin and dry finger bones. When he was outside, he sat down with his arms raised, but Bodín told him to take out of the tomb everything that he had in it. He obeyed in silence. When all the human remains had appeared—dry rags, bones, a bit of yellow flannel—Bodín turned the torch light inside. There at the back was the lantern. Bodín himself went in and brought it out. We searched the spy. We took a revolver from him, a few type-written sheets, and a dagger. Bodín laughed.

‘Why have you got all that with you?’

The spy begged:

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'Don't kill me here.'

We took him out towards the village. I said to him in the friendly way one speaks to a beaten man:

'You are a clever fellow, aren't you? You took refuge with the dead thinking that the living wouldn't go there. Were you long in the tomb?'

'No, only a few minutes. But don't kill me in this village.'

Bodín looked sourly at him. He was making a lot of conditions. I was curious. In the same friendly way—what a strange and sad friendliness, with a criminal about to die—I asked him why he did not wish to die there. The spy appeared to be baffled by my politeness, that easiness with him as if he were already a stick or a stone. And one had to ask oneself what kind of treatment that was which not only did not save him, but assured his disgraceful death, the death of a traitor. He admitted that it was a childish feeling, but he did not want to be buried in that cemetery.

Apparently he had been in mortal fear. When I said that to him, he replied:

'It isn't fear. It is a kind of repugnance. Thinking that I am going to end there, I feel a repugnance.'

I asked him what was repugnant to him, and he told me that it was everything, his coat, his flesh. Bodín said brutally:

'Naturally!'

I hid my infinite pity. To have a repugnance to one's own dead body was worse than death. The spy was a man of about forty years. He confessed that he was a traditionalist and monarchist. Looking about him, he said that his repugnance came from the fact that when he was going into the tomb a black snake came out of it, hairy, thicker than his arm. He seemed to be saying, poor man, with his gesture, 'I did not expect that death would send us to these places, with such creatures. That it is not nothingness. It is a nothingness full of dirt and horror.'

He asked me when we were going to kill him. I told him that presently we'd go to Olias, to hand him over to headquarters. I believed I could get him to talk. 'You are going to die,' I said to him, 'and first you ought to let us know what information you gave the enemy. It is a good thing to end one's

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own life with a generous and humane action, free from politics. If you tell us, you will probably save the lives of a number of men to-morrow.' The spy stared at me. My tone, perhaps, surprised him.

'Would you do it if you were in my place?'

'I can't imagine myself in your place.'

The fact that I was not using the familiar second person seemed to encourage him to speak. He asked me again what I should have done had our parts in the cemetery been reversed.

'I don't know,' I said. 'Perhaps I would have shot myself after having tried to kill some of those who were pursuing me.'

'Yes, that is right. I ought not to have gone into that tomb.'

We went with the prisoner towards Olias. At the level crossing Bodín with the fifteen soldiers went on with him. As I went off, the spy was sure that they were going to shoot him a few yards farther on.

I went towards the culvert and I looked for León without finding him. I went inside and waited. Again I thought of the afternoon's victory which had slipped from our hands. I asked myself if some day history would take the trouble to explain in cases like that why we had not won, or if it would be contented to create among people a barbarous atmosphere of admiration for the 'victors', and of jeers and gibes for the 'conquered', and if that would be the atmosphere, they would create for my brave comrades, the true heart of Spain, the heroism and civic feeling of Spain.

There was a sheet of newspaper at my feet. I read a comment that 'time was working for us'. That seemed to me to be childishly optimistic. Time works for no one. Time works for itself, and devours all of us. The only way in which the aphorism might be true would be in respect to future centuries. Certainly the centuries would work for us, and our effort—even if the worst came to the worst, and it was interrupted for the time being by the weapons of the two great Powers and our immediate enemies—would not be destroyed. All the barriers would have to be undermined and a subterranean passage made which, some day, in another epoch would come out to spread over the surface. So much was certain. And per-

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haps then, young generations, brave, and I do not say happy—what an illusion that is!—but certainly in real contact with the surrounding world will study episodes like ours of this day affectionately.

I tried to fall asleep in the midst of such thoughts, but I did not sleep. León, who had rested more, was devoting himself to the evacuation of the wounded and dead. I did not sleep because my thoughts had excited me too much. But I usually am unable to sleep unless some persistent memory or illusion takes me away from the place in which I am. To be able to sleep I had to get away from the sensation of the arched culvert, the hard ground, the feet of a comrade (he was in charge of the motors) determined to make them comfortable against my stomach.

I don't know why there came back to me the memory of the swathed tuberculous corpse, forgotten like a parcel among the broken glass of the surgery at Guadarrama. Round about that package, which I kicked with my foot, and which gave out a hard and dry sound like that of esparto grass or hay stuck together with mud, things gave a lunar feeling. Cold, white and dry, dry without moisture, without veins, cold and dry as glass. Or colder than glass; cold as the linen sheet in which it was wrapped and which was tied over the head and shoulders, tied with a hempen cord like a clothes' line. The lines which stretch between two poles and sound like an old woman's laugh in the inner courtyards of our house while we read or sleep in our drowsy armchair.

That package . . . that package, which was a man.

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CHAPTER XVIII

AEROPLANES OVER MADRID

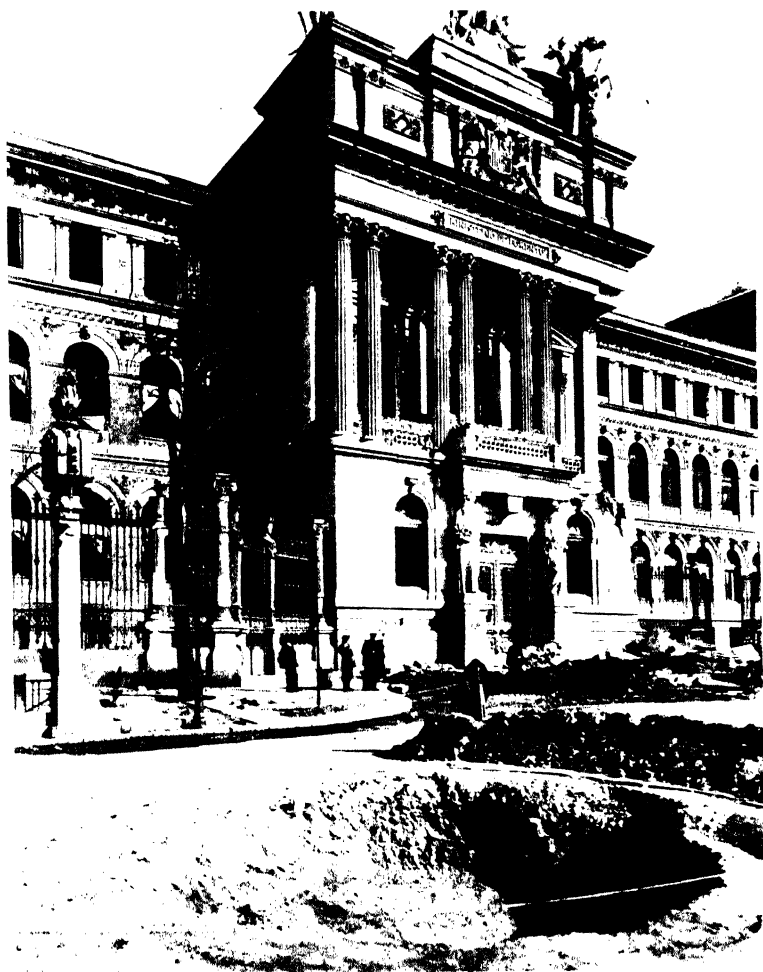
The German and Italian aeroplanes flew daily over Madrid. From the frequency of their attacks we could see that they were bombarding us not as an isolated objective, but as an active part of our rearguard or even of our second line. 'They are doing to Madrid', we said to ourselves, 'what they did to Talavera when they were going to capture Talavera, and what they did to Toledo when they were going to capture Toledo.' And, behind these reflections, we were asking ourselves if they would succeed in taking Madrid. In the question there was more than a strategical curiosity, there was the probability that it meant death and defeat, or life and victory, for all of us. We, a hundred thousand men in arms, had made that reflection, and we were ready to defend every corner, every window, every entrance, whilst we still breathed. But the old questions kept returning; was this frame of mind of ours that of triumph, or only of sacrifice? The real pain of war lurks in chance, uncertain probability. Clear and definite danger doesn't matter, even although its threat is greater than our means of defence. The worst is the uncertainty, the wide field in which the unforeseen operates. And it was there that the enemy operated.

The German and Italian aeroplanes—the most modern, the most dependable—with the new devices for discharging bombs recently issued from the secret chambers of the general staffs, continued to take advantage of space. Their first object was civic terrorism. We could arrange nothing yet against that. Madrid had lived in the war, but had hardly

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seen it, its misery being compensated for by the grandeur and the joy of victory. How would the peaceful citizens of Madrid face the attack of the armies, Moorish—foreign-legionary—German—Falangist—Italian—Requeté? A long siege, with the monster appearing at every turning in the outskirts, through all the avenues and squares beyond the city limits; how would all that be faced and resisted by the people of Madrid?

The bombardment of these early days made it possible to form an idea of the reaction in Madrid. The great trimotors arrived—they were white that day for the first time—escorted by more than twenty 'chasers'. Their white colour was a pre-sage of the funeral of children. In the streets of the working-class suburbs, which were preferred by the pilots because there were more people in them and each bomb could do more damage, the children were excited over their games, and the women went about with their marketing baskets. Groups of militia on leave, or recovering from wounds, or who had left the hospital because of the haste to get better which all had, gazed at the sky and saw coming near the huge mechanical cloud charged with danger, as peasants watch the approach of a thunder-storm. The children sought the eyes of their mothers, and these with a rapid glance consulted the looks of the militia. When the soldiers of the people without losing their calmness as fighters, advised them that the danger was coming near, people took refuge in the cellars of the nearest houses. But that was not always successful. Often it happened that bombs weighing two hundred pounds fell on those who had taken refuge in the cellars, and smashed the house. In Madrid, as in other cities, the workers' suburbs have narrow streets. The summits of houses of four or five stories seem to unite high up, and sometimes the arrival of the aeroplanes was unexpected. At first the pilots preferred those broken-down little streets with tall, old houses. On that morning they threw bombs on La Cuesta de Santo Domingo (thirty killed, including thirteen children), on a narrow little street close to the Cava Baja where a queue of women were waiting to buy milk (eleven women killed, one with a child in her arms), on the Hospital de San Carlos close to the Faculty of Medicine (seven patients, two nurses and a doctor killed),



Madrid: Ministry of Public Works bombarded by the
Enemy

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and on the working-class suburb, Tetuan de las Victorias, where most of the houses are of two stories, whole blocks smashed, with blood and smoke among the ruins. That was the usual balance of each attack.

Sometimes they threw bombs on a 'school group'—the little shelters in gardens could not be mistaken for arsenals, workshops or barracks—and then seventy, eighty, a hundred, in one case three hundred and nine children killed, which filled the suburb, the city and loyal Spain with the deepest mourning and an infinite grief. Why children? Why these lives of five or six years and of unlimited hopes? The metal, even the smallest fragment, was monstrously too large for their small breasts. All the children of the world together could never understand the rage of those who threw these bombs. By their blood, their tender arms broken, their eyes which passed from astonishment at life to astonishment at death before having seen anything, the nationalist gangsterism, and even the high circles of the Roman Church (all of whom counted on these things as factors in producing terror) thought that they could conquer us. But the women, under the cloud of steel, were no longer women. They became transfigured into lovely wild creatures of God. For each one who was crushed (I saw one woman, still young, who was pregnant, become almost crazy, if one could call so natural an excitement crazy, who did not wish to give birth to her child, and kept screaming with tears to her child not to come into the world), for each one of these, there were a hundred who called out to their children—'Grow up, my sons, before the evil reaches everything. Have the strength soon to fire a rifle.'

As for the men, anger flashed in their eyes. Perhaps they swallowed their tears, or perhaps some of them wept when the tragedy struck their own homes, but round about them gathered manly arms which clasped them round the shoulders, whilst other voices hoarse with emotion, swore:

'We shall avenge you, comrades.'

But always these tears cleared the brain and increased the bitter zeal to use once more the bayonet on the rifle. The tears lasted less time than the explosion of the shell, but

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strengthened the will of those around better than the best harangues. Once I saw a militiaman weeping. It was after an aerial bombardment of Leganitos Street. The very day that man came back on three days' leave a bomb destroyed his house, and all his family perished in the ruins—his wife, his children, his old parents. I shall always remember the impression made on me when for the first time I saw these tears as a threat and a masculine resolution. If the tactics learnt by the German, Italian and Spanish pilots counted on such desperation as a favourable factor, after I had seen that man weeping I tell you that out of the living solidarity of the humble, a barrier can be formed against which the general staffs of Germany and Italy have found no successful weapons. Such feelings, growing here and there, giving tone to a heart and strength to a muscle, create obstacles insuperable to the science of the most modern army. The eyes of a child made that Moor of Adamuz retrace his steps. By tearing them out the Moor thought that he had settled everything. But round the blinded child the oldest peasants felt their blood boiling, and if there were another attack on Adamuz, instead of abandoning the village and fleeing, they would stay, hold every inch of the ground, defending it with their fowling guns, their knives, sticks and naked fists. The practice of terrorism on which the German and Italian general staffs relied so much, and which was accepted by Franco, the man of straw exhibited by them to the Spanish people as the only responsible person, was bound to fail with us. Terrorism cannot conquer beings with a developed sense of their own dignity. With a people such as the Spaniards terrorism can only mobilize new sources of resistance and make the struggle more passionate.

The aeroplanes came over Madrid swiftly, sought the most thickly inhabited quarters and dropped their bombs. As they felt the paved streets trembling under their feet, many old men and not a few young men of the bourgeois Right parties nodded their heads, saying:

'It is impossible that those who are doing it are Spanish. They must be foreigners, German or Italian.'

Among us, the militia, there were many who agreed with such words. They must be foreigners—such was the genero-

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sity of many who were still carrying their arms in slings or were hobbling on crutches—not to feel love for our people, our homes, our workshops and gardens, our children. But although the militia said so, they kept a truer interpretation at the back of their minds, whilst the old people really believed it. To these old people things came very late. They were to go on dying amidst new surprises, like the children. They were ignorant of many things and would not be able to learn them, as, preserving the humble cleanliness of their lives, they refused to listen to the voice of the Beast.

What did that voice say? The Heinckel and Junker and the Capronni aeroplanes spoke to sharply listening ears from the blue skies of Madrid. On the burning sky they left their trail of steel and their infamous words:

‘We are Might, and Might acknowledges only its own laws. Only itself and its own will. Kill children? Yes. Beget them or kill them, all the same to us. It is Might that begets them. It amuses us to see the dead children and their fathers putting down their rifles to weep over them. That is a spectacle only for strong men. We are the powerful, the higher consciences, and we amuse ourselves over the sorrow of others and our capacity for cruelty is not only not a stigma of inferiority or degeneration, but a gift that Nature keeps for her chosen ones.

‘You will call this immoral? But who defines morality? What is morality? A few dogmas to be imposed on the general mass, a few dogmas to be taken as self-evident. Right to live? No, but the obligations, the duties of life. The strong destroy morality and create a new morality with the obligation to moral and material servitude. We came imposing the new morality, with the aid of the god Violence. For that we have come, and that we are doing. The will to power, from which we proceed, has a faithful ally, Trinitrotoluene. That is our language. It enters the brain by breaking the skull as if it were a dry gourd. These dead perhaps doubt our might and our right to might. Now they have an indestructible certainty about it, the earth and the worm, or if they prefer [and here cynical laughter seemed to echo across the skies] evidence of compelling validity.

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'We come through the air so that we may not soil the elegance of our uniforms, the cleanness of our youth, the airy gallantry of our gestures, with the turbid crowded atmosphere of the masses, brutalized by danger and by their black forebodings. Your will trails along the pavements of the city, speaking of liberty, of rights, of the good, of justice and of Man, Man with a capital letter. Do you believe that life is impossible without these, that it is not worth living? But they are only illusions which can creep in whatever the circumstances, the language or the race. All that you say you are fighting for, the makers of these aeroplanes, these bombs, in Italy and in Germany have; that is to say they have the illusion which is the only thing that you could have, and that illusion is enough for them, as it will be enough for you, inferior beings who need illusions to compensate for your feebleness.

'We shall destroy, destroy, destroy. It is our watchword. The fewer of you, the feeble, who remain, the better. The few who survive shall obey us. The places of the dead in the workshop, the bank, commerce, the fields will be taken by Germans of whom there are too many in Germany, and Italians who are superfluous in Italy. We shall choose the feeblest, those who think most like you, so that they may strengthen themselves by the exercise of rule and power, and even wealth. Until now we have only miserable slaves. By the power of Trinitrotoluene we shall have as slaves people not so poor, and perhaps even rich, which is more convenient for us. Are we coming here for crime? Ha! Ha! Ha! Who defines crime? On the day when we have destroyed everything, we shall define it. We shall have chroniclers and historians who shall prove in solemn academies, that you are the only criminals, not because we trouble about crime, which is a low-class moral conception, but so as to make easier, in other feeble countries, a truce of tolerance of 'right' whilst we can prepare new deeds of might like this.'

And they seem to end with glacial words:

'We are in the Madrid sky, over you. Die and be silent, for that is your fate.'

The trimotors escorted by a cloud of 'chasers' (eighty-five



Alcalá de Henares. Font in which Cervantes was baptized, destroyed by the Enemy Aviation

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motors of 400 horse-power, a strength of 32,000 horses) scattered over the sky in black and white squadrons of petrol and aluminium, kept flying over the city, dropping their bombs on chimneys which were sending out the peaceful smoke of breakfast. Madrid, which was already ceasing to be the laughing hive of peace and becoming an objective, also spoke. In its crowded tramcars, in its trees, in the simple and warm grace of its women. Its voice, perhaps, was not very assured, because Madrid has never been boastful. It is a cultured, simple and industrious city, and when Franco says that he is going to capture it, and pompously appoints a date quite near, it confines itself to saying: 'We shall do all that is possible to prevent him.' Its virile serenity and energy are well in harmony. 'We shall do what is possible.' That is what they have been doing since November 7.

'We are love, peace and toil,' it said under the aeroplanes. 'If you are the strong and the chosen, why do you not respect our love for our children, our grief? The strong are known by their generosity and the weak by their cruelty. You are not the strong, for the strong never proclaim their strength. Those who do so are weaklings, or, sick with power, doubly weak. We do not believe ourselves the chosen of Nature, and do not know if we are strong or not. We believe that all have the right to live, and that the obligations consequent on that right must be established and organized by reason, not by madness. We do not require pride like yours in order to resist. We know how to resist you calmly, even if our hands are empty. Whether we or you are the stronger or the weaker will be known only at the end. We shall do what we can to disabuse you.'

Distant explosions shook the air, and the concussions reached the glass in the windows and rattled them like a hurricane. The wounded morning of Madrid knocked at our windows asking help. Everyone hurried to open them, and although they did so only to prevent new shocks from breaking the glass, the morning took the opportunity to enter. Madrid went on talking under the bombs:

'We lack that will to power but have the will to live together in love and peace and liberty. Perhaps you call the selfishness of the profiteering manufacturers of armaments, or

of the internal creditors of the Third Reich, and of the 'Empire' of Rome 'will to power'. But to defend these there is no need for such mad sophisms. We ourselves believe in the creative activity of the sentiment of liberty, from which has arisen, so far, all that we call civilization, and we also believe in the grandeur of human dignity. From these two sentiments, which also are universal ideas, we shall draw, if the case demands it, the necessary impetus to resist and to attack, trying thus to save for the future our national independence, our sacred freedom for self-determination, our political liberties. Without them life has no interest for us, as it would be contemptible. If you continue resolved to attack us, you will meet, as you have done up to now, the points of our bayonets. Your trinitrotoluene has covered our paving-stones with the blood and brains of our children. The evidence of these children is no longer of interest to anyone or to themselves. We can no longer see them or feel for them except through their absence. But other evidence of your crimes increases daily, and you will see in the future whether or no it is of outstanding weight. We shall try to make you feel its crushing importance in your flesh and your money, which are the only things alive in you and through which we can make you suffer. Let us remind you, Heinckels and Junkers, of a few pages of a great German of that Germany which we all love—Heine. Remember the executioner whose axe, after having been used in many executions, was so drunk with blood that it became dangerous even to the one who was wielding it, and had to be buried in a deep pit and covered with soil. And you, Capronnis, it will suffice to remind you of any page of the *Inferno* of Dante, a citizen of that Italy whose immortality we are the first to proclaim. These two memories are all that we offer you in face of your boastfulness in crime. We need not speak to you of the tyrants who in those days sanctified crime as a weapon of policy because time has devoured these despots, the same time conquered by Dante and by the poet of Düsseldorf. No doubt you can tell us that time doesn't know what it does, but we need not reply to what is simply an example of your delirium.'

From building N, from the roof of building V, from various

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high places in the city, machine-guns signal by their firing the approach of the cloud. Amongst these sometimes the hoarse and profane voice of the automatic guns is raised. On the concrete of the tall modern buildings, between stone balustrades and marble friezes, vigilant mouths of steel protrude. The clamour, broken into short blasts, intermittent, suddenly reminds us that the high chimney tops of the city, accustomed only to reflections of dead moons, had mobilized themselves and were on guard for our children. Madrid continued to reply:

‘If you come by the air, we await you with our feet planted on the earth, on the real earth which is our very own truth identified with our consciences and our hearts. The air is for ghosts; the earth for living beings. You come by the air, far off, cowardly, moving by blind machines. Your bad conscience corrupts the lovely machine, but sometimes it carries you to the earth which for you is death. Smash open skulls and destroy buildings! From amidst the ruins will stretch out the arm of man in menace. The blood-stained last beam will hardly have reached the ground when men run to help their fellow men. From your height you may have been able to see how upon the smoking ruins, deaf to threats, the pact of human solidarity is signed, without talk, without cynical sophisms, without invocations to the superman. One man raises a beam and another puts his shoulder under a cornice to pull out a dying man. That very solidarity is no illusion. And that solidarity is a truth of the earth to which you must return, because you cannot always be in the air. When our comrades are helping each other, they are thinking of the peace and the liberty of the morrow, for their sons, and of the well-being of to-day for the old. With blood they attain these and with blood they defend them. These are not illusions; only those can think them illusions who have no humanity, and so are insensible to the greatness of humanity, like you, because they feel themselves unfit for it.’

Cars with the apparatus for first aid rush, sounding hurried gongs. More than one of them leaps into the air, it and the militia who were in it, blown into fragments. But another car, ringing bravely, rushes over the bloody wreckage.

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‘Although you destroy to-day, we shall build up to-morrow. We have arms and the spirit to rebuild everything. But, moreover Might does not reveal itself by destruction. If that were so, the sun would burn up everything instead of fecundating everything. Strength reveals itself by creation. Not everyone possesses that strength, and those without it wish to replace it by arrogance, by excessive display. And along that way the individual passes straight to crime. In a nation, as in your case, to war. And your work, which has no limits, will die without glory, will drag you to death by the same road; crime and war. You have reached the top of the steps. Take care, because the arrogance of a single gesture may plunge you into space. We are peace, love, creative work. More than ever to-day, with our rifles in our hands, we are peace and love. Destroy! We must wait. But you deceive yourselves if you think it our duty to die without replying to you. Know that we are not always without mechanical might.’

From above the Salamanca suburb some black points arose over the distant horizon. There were only six or seven. A few seconds afterwards, the black points grew into black bodies, spindle-shaped, plump, short, with a velocity of projectiles rather than of aeroplanes. The huge black-and-white cloud of fascist trimotors hesitated. Their perfect formations broke up. Some changed their direction in their haste to escape or to get elevation to meet the attack, others fled altogether. Our swift avengers, made not to sow destruction on women and children but to repel and destroy the aggressors, rapidly overtook the trimotors and the enemy ‘chasers’. High up in the air were to be heard the first machine-guns. Children, men, and even sick old women rushed to the windows:

‘Our pug-nosed ones! Here come our pug-nosed ones!’

Soon the enemy was driven from the sky, and the air again became the clean and sweet sky of Madrid. We learned to distinguish between the explosions of bombs and the broken-winged falling of our enemies; and whilst the proletarian machines were in the air, all Madrid breathed with the pulse changed, not by the danger but by the excitement and joy of victory. Alas that they were so few, against so many! But their voice sounded in the ears of the militia:

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‘There is one country in the world, a great country, where free proletarian engineers can surpass the products of other countries, and have learned that the world is to be freed, not by theories, but by tenacious and intelligent effort.’

CHAPTER XIX

THE ENEMY AT THE GATE

We had our barracks on the road to Chamartín and in the middle of the afternoon I went to join the troops which were leaving that night. There were definite orders at the barracks. I went in a touring car, with a young poet who had enrolled in the militia 'because it seemed shameful to wait for the enemy in his house in Madrid'. The man rather sympathized with the anarchists. I have a tendency to dispute with whoever is speaking to me, by twisting his arguments against himself, and we kept talking on the journey. Anarchism attracted the young poet, but he judged it rather frivolously, from the point of view of a bourgeois, which he had always been. He saw it as 'splendid and absurd'. It was the extreme drive to the Left of one who had to make a great effort to tear himself out of his milieu, and that effort had taken him to the other extreme.

'You are dazzled', I told him, 'by the anarchist passion for liberty.'

'Perhaps, but there is something very substantial in all of it.'

'The apotheosis of the individual. Because individualism is the basis of your character and, now that you are seeing the worker as the hero, you like to find it consecrated by a workers' organization. Besides, this can be explained in your case. The individualistic exaltation of Spanish anarchists is of a religious type, and religions tend to be poetical. For me it all comes to the same thing; the religions derived from Judaism—Catholic, Mahomedan, Protestant—with their thousands

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of churches, turn God into a man, and, on the other hand, the anarchist tends to transform man into a God.'

He liked that.

'Is it not worth while to pause and consider that?' he asked in a satisfied way.

'Certainly, we shall do that, but still keeping to the theory. The anarchists would be pure theorists if they did not escape from theory, absurdly, as you say, by an atavistic religious feeling. And what splendid comrades they would make! What splendid comrades they actually are individually, in nearly every case! What doubt is there but that we are going to make man a being master of his infinite resources, master of the world, and to some extent ruler of all the natural forces captured and enslaved by science? But we must not be dazzled by far distant perspectives.'

'A little dreaming does no harm.'

'None, certainly, but with real imagination dreams are the first step. To invent a distant reality as a means of escape is more of a fantasy, an inferior kind of imagination. True imagination assigns another task to dreams; to keep us in living contact with the obscure and difficult interpretation of what is close to us, present and immediate.'

'In fact,' concluded my friend, 'communism implies effort, work, dryness. In anarchism there is something light and dazzling.'

'But in this world results are not gained by men who are light-minded or hallucinated, but by brains familiar with the concrete fact and quick in accepting its significance. Communism's stern devotion to efficiency is admirable,' I added.

My friend had to agree with me, because in the facts of every hour he saw the energy, the intelligence and the silent effort of the communists, who, if they were then the first in anything, were so simply in self-sacrifice.

'Some day', I told him, 'it will be known. To-day we can grasp only the exterior appearance of all that is happening, but later on it will be possible to analyse and estimate separately all the factors of victory. What joy to be able to tell the whole world, "See what man can achieve." And not the

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Faustlike man of Spengler—another hallucinated person—but the labourer, the worker, the producer.’

‘That is true,’ he said, ‘the communist party in Spain is almost entirely working-class, and I do not like that.’

‘Why not?’

‘It frightens me a little. It gives the impression that it might lead to an exclusive sect of workers, which is always dismal and sad.’

The Jesuits are really an exclusive sect, gloomy and sad, and that sect did not frighten my friend. I asked him if it were not so, and he admitted it, and in his turn asked me:

‘Does sectarianism not frighten you?’

‘Yes, but in a particular way. As a danger for the working classes, a political illness from which they must free themselves.’

Once more I got the impression that to the bourgeois class, including those of them who were progressive and trustworthy, the conception of communism was one of work, of effort, of silent heroism. An uncomfortable idea.

Then we discussed the danger, now imminent, of an attack on Madrid. The menace did not terrify me, and he did not understand that. The conclusions to which we came after a long discussion were these, more or less: if everyone were ready to make the utmost effort, even to die, we should win the battle of Madrid and the war. We agreed that the atmosphere in the city was becoming very strange, moment by moment, and we thought that an excellent symptom. A change in disposition was manifest, and everyone was beginning to work in a different spirit. All the organizations opened their ranks more widely, and unconditionally supported the Republican State. All but one. But that one had little strength in the centre, in Castile, and if it had strength in Valencia and Catalonia a moment must come when the influence of example, that moral example on which the anarchists themselves relied so much, would lead them to collaborate loyally. In fact the absence of that support was only a phenomenon of the body as a whole, and did not correspond with the real will to act of each worker, but to theoretical prepossessions and vague doctrines easy to refute.

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As we were going out of Madrid we saw a man on the ground, under the trees at the side of the road. Although neither his face nor his clothing seemed to be those of a person accustomed to sleep on the ground, he appeared to be asleep, under the trees. But he was dead. My friend made a gesture of repugnance. A few yards farther on, at the side of a little enclosure of box, children were playing, and their mothers were chatting beside the perambulators of their infants. The children as well as the mothers had noticed that they were close to a dead body. My friend did not believe it, and we stopped to make sure. We saw that some of the children were stretching over the box hedge to look at the body, and the mothers hurriedly and nervously called them away. Then they began to talk again, and to go on with their sewing, tranquilly.

My company, now transformed into a battalion, received the order to become part of a brigade which was to go hurriedly to the front. I asked where the front was, because the insecure Extremadura line had been so forced back on Madrid, that I suspected that we would not have to go far outside.

'For the present,' they told me, 'you are going to Getafe. You will sleep to-night in the station without leaving the train, and before dawn the commander of the brigade will come with instructions for you.'

We set out in four special trains when it was already night. The trains were crammed. The militia with their war experience of that front went back to it courageously. The fact that the enemy was getting close to Madrid gave rise to a kind of irony against which fear of the hostile aviation was broken or dulled. The soldiers said:

'Now we have the front at a sixpenny fare from our houses.' (The ordinary railway fare from Madrid to Getafe was sixpence.) Others, half ironically and half prophetically, remarked:

'We are still retreating, but when the enemy reaches Madrid you'll see how everyone will stick it out, for then we won't be able to 'fall back on Madrid', and there will be nothing for it then but to screw ourselves into the ground.'

They knew very well that if the enemy succeeded in push-

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ing us farther back, hundreds of dead would be left on the ground between our lines at Getafe and Carabanchel, but if that were inevitable, one resource remained, to make a joke of it. That was the usual attitude on the fronts of Toledo and Extremadura.

Here and there they lamented:

‘On these fronts only Moors and Germans are to be seen.’

In another group someone said:

‘Do you know that fifteen thousand more Italians have been landed at Cadiz?’

There was a moment of discouragement whilst these words were still vibrating in the air. There was always someone who would say:

‘It isn’t possible that soldiers should come in masses unless they had been deceived by Mussolini, the master butcher of his country. Undeceiving them with words or with the points of our bayonets, we shall help to free the Italian people.’

So talking, we reached Getafe. The trains were aligned in four parallel rows. Lights were put out, doors were closed, and everyone tried to sleep in his seat. The night was very cold—the nights of early autumn in Castile—and I spent it on foot between the stationmaster’s office, where there was a fire, and the first houses on the road from Getafe station to Cerro de los Angeles. I gazed at the dark fields lying open in front of us and asked myself:

‘Is it possible that we must wait for the enemy here?’

I could not understand why the enemy should have already in his power all the villages which lay in front of me disappearing in the dark—Parla, Pinto, Valdemoro, and, on the right, Torrejón, Fuenlabrada. As that was so, it would be better for us to fall back on the suburbs of Madrid, and wait for them there.

Three thousand five hundred or four thousand young lives were crowded in a space of not more than eighty yards. The four trains were close together. The usual load of one trimotor would have been enough to destroy the brigade in a few minutes.

But dawn came without any incident. A few minutes before, the trains were moved and the men were separated, not

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so much to take up positions as to lessen the congestion in the station and to give a smaller target to the aviation. It seemed that the enemy was not so very near. We spent the day trying to establish our central office. When it had been half-finished, we received the order to attack at dawn next morning. Our points of departure were ten or twelve miles farther on, and the operation was to have a long front with the columns of Aranjuez on the left, and of Fuenlabrada on the right. The command of the sector was in Parla. We had to make a frontal attack and dislodge the enemy from Seseña at the first shock. For that we had artillery, aviation and tanks. Until then I had not seen on our side anything better than armoured cars, more or less well protected. The enemy used against them steel bullets, short and pointed, smaller than the usual bullet, and we had seen them pass through the armour easily. The news about the tanks filled us with optimism. Moreover the aviation gave a magnificent promise. The difficulties having been allowed for, no one on our side doubted for a moment the certainty and ease of a triumph.

The forces had to be moved in lorries if we were to escape the results of two nights without proper sleep, of bad catering, and of the actual march, all of which would tire the troops too much. But we were short of lorries. Finally, when we no longer expected them, and half the troops had already begun the march on foot—some of the companies had accomplished half the distance—more than fifty empty lorries arrived. The great column with its motors running, instead of helping our transport, betrayed our concentrations to the enemy, and put them on their guard. Towards the middle of the night, Valdemoro, the base of the movements of our brigade, was overcrowded by our militia. The troops were marching out on foot and deploying to occupy a line of more than two miles, stretching obliquely from the high road. By two in the morning, everything was in order. In less than forty hours the brigade had been moved from its encampment behind the lines in Madrid, had been re-equipped and armed—its arms had been changed for weapons quite different—an unknown kind of rifle, still greased, without belts, which had to be improvised—moved to Getafe and installed in the places from

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which the attack was to start. More could not be asked. At three in the morning we had notice of the arrival of new pieces of artillery, and the commander of the tanks took us to look them over. The artillery began its work at 6.30. The first shot was to be the signal for the advance, which the tanks were to begin, whilst the aeroplanes surveyed the enemy positions. Everything seemed to us easy and brilliant, and the thirst for victory infected all of us. Our positions were excellent and our artillery was sufficient. The tanks would do their work.

Among the militia we saw some peasants from the village itself equally valiant and optimistic. They surveyed our preparations and murmured with satisfaction:

‘It was time for you to come and lock the doors here.’

In the rural air of Valdemoro all the noise, the coming and going of motor-cycles, artillery messages, reports of the dispatch riders and of the scouting patrols poured strong injections of steel into the village. From that day onwards there would be in the village homes a complete change of memories and of subjects of talk. The standard of feelings and the measure of risk and adventure would be completely changed. Everything would become new and different.

Two military hospitals were installed, with one hundred and fifty beds in each. Ambulances would take the lighter cases direct to Madrid as soon as first aid had been given.

The morning was advancing. All preparations had been made. With tense nerves we waited the first artillery firing, arranged to be at half-past six. It was already fifteen minutes late. I was about to go to the batteries when the general commander told me to wait in charge of the supplies and to be in telephone contact with the chief of the sector, a young man who had reached that post because of his bravery. When he saw that I disliked his decision, he said that from noon on I should go to the lines and he would take my place.

Our artillery opened fire. The heavy guns fired from behind town. The tanks were arriving, stopping a moment in a row in front of the staff station, and then advancing as a long procession of armoured cars. I thought that my friend and chief was seeking a personal success, which seemed to me both noble and intelligible. He had spent much time on the fronts



A Leader in the central Sector

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fighting with real heroism. But luck counts for much in the military history of any individual, and there had fallen to his lot crises in which only retreat, facing the enemy and selling the ground dear were possible. All that he had carried out like a brave man, but it was not enough for him. He sought a personal triumph. He wished things to march at the pace set by his own enthusiasm. And that day everything seemed to promise victory.

I explained to him the situation of the troops that I had deployed and placed. He knew the objectives better than I did. I stayed in the general staff post deducing from the noises in the field how the operation was proceeding. The hammering of the guns, the rattling of the machine-guns and rifles, the explosions of the motors of the tanks and the cycles combined to a single huge roar:

‘The victory is cooking!’

CHAPTER XX

DISAPPOINTMENT

I could not leave my post at the telephone, beside the hospitals, the petrol deposit and the munitions dump. But I tried to read what was happening from the signs. Every now and again I sent a motor-cyclist to a point of observation with no other object than to watch there for a quarter of an hour and then come back to tell me what he had seen. As I knew the positions of our forces I deduced the progress of the operations from the vague reports of the motorists. I stayed at my post, attending to a thousand little things that my assistant could have done, but I did not wish to disobey my chief. All the same, and because the experience may enlighten and improve us, these events will have to be analysed some day as they could have been the beginning of a fully developed offensive by us. It was not so, because the circumstances of which I have already spoken combined again. But neither can the day be counted among our failures, because the fact of not carrying all our objectives was not defeat, but lack of organization in the offensive. My friend and chief worked to pull things together in a way that I had never seen anyone doing. Perhaps others might not have allowed certain circumstances to happen, but once they had happened, few leaders would have been able to fight against them, conquer them, take the sting out of them, better than him. But now you may read what did happen.

In the middle of the morning all was going well. Once again our aviation failed us. The promise made the night before to our officers and chiefs was still unfulfilled, by the

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middle of the morning. At that time we had many fronts and few aeroplanes.

The weather kept magnificent. To go out into the street—that street which was the highway itself, the umbilical cord of the battle—was to come under the burning light of one of these days of Castilian autumn, more luminous than those even of summer. As they passed over us, the shells of our artillery were throwing over us a dome of burning steel.

For the moment I left my assistant in the staff office, and went out. I looked all round me, whilst I was getting on a motor-cycle. At such moments everything was interesting. Even the smallest things had an unusual interest. There seemed something significant in the direction taken across the sky by a flock of birds, in the confident expression of a peasant leaning against the hinges of his door, or of a driver waiting at the wheel of his lorry while water was poured into the radiator. The appearance of everything gave some clue to what was happening. A detail of which usually no notice would be taken and which was important was whether the sun was in front or behind during an advance. When it was behind, the enemy could be seen much more clearly. Field glasses brought the images closer, but if the sun were in front, it could only dazzle us and reveal us by the glitter of bayonets, the polished metal of the motors, and the windscreens of the cars.

I stopped on a low elevation at the exit from the village. From there a part of the field could be seen. Our guerillas were still advancing on the left, in marching order, not yet in touch with the enemy, or firing. Once more I reflected that war to-day was subject to the same general laws which have ruled it for thirty centuries. Then and now it is a question of time and space, just as in politics. A man with the instinct for manœuvre can gain diabolical pleasures in these two activities, politics and war. But in the matter of time and space (in time, surprise and counter-surprise, and in space the plane of attack, the angle of defence, the prevention of being absorbed or dominated by distance, the inert factor in war) there are an infinite number of possible combinations, as with the nine Arabic numerals. In our case, the inertia of space usually

dominated us. We were too straightforward in war, and only when we had accumulated men and material superior to those of the enemy did we feel certain of victory. Of what did our failure in manœuvre consist? It was our everlasting linear vision of things, our want of faith in intrigue and in surprise attack, perhaps our distrust of intelligence. All these were opposed by simple and universal human factors which to us seemed in themselves to have sufficient force to be adopted. We attacked frontally, wave after wave, with the breast uncovered and sometimes with a song on the lips. Our watchwords always were based on sane human morale. We were always right, and it would have been impossible to convince a single militiaman or leader that to be too much in the right might be as dangerous as to be wrong.

The idea of the architectonic in war came to us later on. Not a simple, linear conception; but a vision in three dimensions—total, complete, as in good architecture. Under equal conditions that conception would always win, in politics as in war, for war is only a material exasperation of politics. Perhaps to reach that state we failed in one indispensable condition; unity of command.

Seeing our troops advancing, in marching order, under the golden sun, supported by the batteries and preceded by the tanks, I was optimistic, but I was worried about movements which did not depend on me, although I was responsible for them. I went back to my post. Some technicians not personally concerned in the day's operations had just arrived from Madrid, and questioned me. The chief of the sector telephoned to me from Parla asking me the position of the troops. I gave it to him and he asked me if we were going to attack Torrejón. I said no, and he seemed very surprised. 'Our first objective is Seseña,' I told him.

He told me that Madrid had informed him that our aviation was flying over the rearguard of the enemy, to prevent concentration. That seemed to me very good, were it true. But I knew too well that our pilots had to multiply themselves by ten every day, and even then, they could not be everywhere. The chief of the section asked again:

'Then you are not attacking Torrejón?'

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'Of course not. And it surprises me that you should ask that, as the instructions for our brigade have already been issued by you.'

'Of course. But I ask you because forces coming from I don't know where are already going towards Torrejón.'

'Now you know. Although I am not in the field and can't tell you what is happening at this moment, I can assure you that our brigade is going against Seseña.'

'Good. Are they in touch with the enemy?'

They had brought me a verbal message a minute before.

'Yes. Our right wing and part of the centre. The left is still advancing.'

'At what distance from the village?'

'Perhaps a couple of miles.'

'Goodbye!'

'At your orders!'

There were two lamentable details in that conversation. First, the chief of the sector did not know the identity of a part of his forces who were in active combat. Second, there was no certainty about the bombardment of the enemy's rearguard. The fact that they should have told us so without our asking, meant that our aviation would not come. I sat down but had to get up again at once, as I was falling asleep.

The commandant of the brigade arrived at mid-day in a state of indignation. I questioned him, but he didn't attend to anything. Perhaps not to answer questions seemed to him obligatory for a real military leader. At last he turned to me:

'Seems as if we are to be the last who enter Seseña. If we don't hurry, Burillo's men will get there first.'

'That would be better,' I said to myself. 'It would be much better if the only problem were who was to enter first.' I told him that the commander of the sector was asking if we were going to attack Torrejón, and my chief went off, muttering something against the chief of the sector. I remained near the telephone, signing orders for petrol. But all the incidents of the fight were surging within me.

Soon after the commander-in-chief had left, in one of the interludes which happen in war, and which it pleases us to fill with extraordinary presentiments, a message came in say-

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ing that our aviation had arrived. But it was the enemy aviation. I went out with two ideas in the forefront of my anxiety; the petrol-tank lorries and the munition dump. A doctor was hurrying in front of me.

‘How many casualties?’

‘About fifty in my hospital,’ he said.

‘Has the evacuation of the wounded been good?’

He made a non-committal gesture.

‘About as usual; no better.’

Three squadrons of trimotors arrived. I went back into the general staff quarters. The droning made the windows shake. Our quarters were in a typical village house with one story and cellars. Three bombs fell just in front, destroying a tree and a telephone standard, and a little lower down, three others. The aeroplanes passed over the village four times, sowing metal. When they had gone, I sent off three couriers. One to the petrol tanks, one to the munition dump; the third to the hospitals. It was only on the last that aeroplanes had hit their target. In one they killed a nurse, a doctor, and several wounded men. In the other they had only smashed a wall without greater damage.

I went to the hospitals where I found several old comrades, now wounded. The bombardment had not demoralized them.

‘It is the third time’, said Bodín, ‘that they have bombarded me in my bed. For all that I care,’ he added casually, ‘they may come back again.’

But there were others, crazed, who kept shouting and wished to throw themselves out of the windows. I went out making reflections now familiar: ‘No-one can accuse us of ever having bombarded a hospital. And yet they have done so on all fronts, in all the villages. For them it is a most agreeable objective, much more appetizing than a battery or a convoy. We are making war without cruelty. But if we should lose it, all the praises of stupid official and traditional history will be for the victors. In politics, all roads are good to reach power; in war, to reach victory. But that bombardment of hospitals excites a moral repulsion, shame of itself and its filthiness, of the most crushing kind. I felt that shame, thinking about

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them, about those who had done it; who were after all human beings, even if they were Germans or Spanish fascists. Going back to my previous reflections, I said to myself, 'This business of bombarding hospitals belongs to the strategy of space.' To sow confusion, to refuse to the wounded or to the dying a moment of peace in which to die, is to tell the combatant: 'You are treading on unsafe ground. You are going to another ground which also will be disputed by rifles and bombs, and if you fall, don't believe that they will carry you to a safe place, to soil of your own, because our projectiles reach everywhere. When you have been carried from the field, our shrapnel will pursue you to your bed. In the hospitals you will find not only soft pillows, white sheets and the smell of ozone, you will also find bombs of two hundred pounds between the beds of yourself and your comrade. Neither the ground on which you are treading is safe, nor that which you are going to tread, or that which you have trod.' Those tactics might win a war but must fail to consolidate a victory. Because of that, if we were not to win (win we shall and bring life to Spain and peace to the world), neither would they win. Spain is lost for fascism which in the end will lose everything.

As for the Germans, it pleases me to recall the heavy farce of Nietzscheism. The Hitlerites—chiefly the German unintellectual middle-class—have been unbalanced by contact with the thoughts of a genius, and the whole phenomenon of Nazism is no more psychologically than could be excited by Nietzsche in the brain of a chemist's or a perfumer's shop assistant. It is more easy to be bad than to be intelligent. And one's crimes can reach farther than even intelligence itself. The draper's assistant who has under his pillow a single book, a copy of Nietzsche, and has read it *twice*, assumes an insolent and impertinent air on Sundays and at his dancing-hall. Perhaps that air has an effect on the cloakroom attendant, or the daughter of the porter at his house, who wept on his shoulder that day. In politics, international politics included, undigested Nietzscheism leads Hitler to begin where Nietzsche left off; to strut as a Napoleon with one hand on his breast and the other on his hip. But these simple devotees of

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evil overlook the fact that in this world not everyone allows himself to be hallucinated by pretenders. Some day the farce will have to face reality. That has begun already in Spain. And every time that I have seen the powerful Junkers and Heinckels pour their metal on hospitals, turn tail at full speed before our 'chasers', four times less in number, and fall in flames, I have thought that reality is facing them. The world will tolerate real fools with pity, but by no means the fools and wicked persons who pretend to exalted genius. These at first may have propitiatory victims; afterwards—ostracism, isolation and death. To think that what has always happened will happen no longer, because in the last thirty years mankind has used motor-cars and aeroplanes, is another illusion of the unintellectual middle-classes. In the aeroplane and the automobile, men and societies have the same stimuli and the same resources of defence. We, Spaniards of the People, may fall into one folly or a hundred. But life, whose laws are infallible, life which watches over us, as over itself, will save our cause, although it may be, as it will be now, whatever happens, on seas of blood.

The chief of the sector 'phoned me again.

'Whose troops are those attacking Torrejón?'

'I don't know that anyone is attacking the village,' I replied, 'but I'll enquire and let you know.'

'Has the aviation done much damage?'

'None; petrol, munitions and guns all right.'

'Losses in the town?'

'A few.'

'Don't forget to tell me what troops those are.'

I hung up the 'phone and went for a dispatch runner to take the question to my chief. Meantime one of the technicians came to see me again. He came struck with fear. A single glance at his face told me that the noise of the battle was not that of a victory. He asked a few questions and went out.

The aeroplanes came back soon afterwards. I looked at my watch. It was past my time, but I thought that my chief had forgotten his promise in the excitement of the offensive. The hostile aviation again was sprinkling bombs over the streets, buildings which seemed suspicious, and the hospitals. I went

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to the door and found Funchall, a Portuguese sergeant-instructor whom we all liked very much, with his face covered with court-plaster. He told me that stones and scraps of metal from an explosion had rasped it. He was darker and thinner than ever. I sent the messenger to the commander and waited. Several bombs fell close to the house. When the squadron came over us again, I sent all those who were with me down into the cellars and went with them. A bomb smashed a house immediately behind.

We came up again, and in a few minutes a car pulled up suddenly at the door and the technician who had been with me before leapt out. He was now in complete alarm:

‘What troops are those coming towards us from over there?’

He pointed to our right flank. I asked him to say exactly from what direction they were coming.

‘From the direction of Valdemoro.’

‘But from where are they coming?’

‘From over there.’

He pointed with his arm to our right flank.

‘It can’t be the enemy,’ I told him.

The technician got into a passion.

‘Why not?’ he bellowed.

Because the chief of that sector is at Parla and he was talking to us and would have told us.’

‘Would have told us!’ he growled. ‘And if the telephone wire has been cut?’

I thought that things might be worse than he supposed. My messenger returned with the information that none of our troops had attacked Torrejón. I called up Parla, paying no attention to the shouts and dramatic gestures of the technician. The chief came to the ‘phone, and I told him what the messenger had told me. The technician, seeing that his desperate alarm was not infecting me, began to drum furiously with a folded yard measure on the map. The chief of the sector said to me on the ‘phone:

‘Then I can’t understand what has happened.’

‘Why?’

‘These troops, after having left a large part of their effectives on the ground, are now retiring on Valdemoro.’

'Are they retiring?' I asked fearing that it was something more disorderly.

'Damn it all,' said the chief, 'one has got to call it something.'

We hung up the 'phones, and I asked the technician in what sort of state the troops were which he had seen. He said that they were in 'attacking order'. I sat down in front of him, and lighted a cigarette. Then I told him that they were our men, 'unfortunately'.

'Why "unfortunately"?''

'If they were fascist troops we might be able to force them back from here. As they are ours, we have to assume that it is they who have been driven back—quite a different matter.'

But the man was relieved that they were ours. In a few minutes the village was full of militia in disorder. I went out and met an officer who had been with me in the Guadarrama patrol.

'Where are you going?'

'Hillo! At your orders.'

'Where is your company?'

He had a completely confused appearance, rather like that of the technician. He shrugged his shoulders.

'That is not an answer,' I told him.

'But it is all the answer I can give you. We have not seen a single tank. Not a single shell fell in the village. Not an aeroplane arrived. Those people seem to have wished us to take the town by a few hand-grenades and bayonets, but we had many losses, and then, as if anything more were needed, the enemy aeroplanes arrived and scattered us.'

I had seen the tanks move off towards Seseña.

'At what village have you been?'

'Where were we meant to go? There?'

On the horizon, stretching behind the house, some five miles away, Torrejón stood out. I felt that the whole plan of attack had crumbled. A feeling of frustration and of deep and complete impotence crushed me. That village was not to have been attacked until the second stage of the offensive. When it arrived, it was untouched. Not a single gun-shot had been fired at it. Their machine-guns, unsoiled, must have

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been waiting for our men, tranquilly, safe, well-rested and on the alert.

The feeling of complete impotence continued. To prevent the officer from noticing, I refrained from telling him of the mistake.

'Within a quarter of an hour the remaining men of your company must be reformed under the shelter of these trees. A hundred of them, or twenty, or only two. You and these two only will be the company.'

'Bodín is wounded,' he said, as if in excuse.

'I have seen him already. And that being so, you were the captain. When they are reformed, come and tell me.'

I was called to the telephone. From the Seseña side some other groups were coming back, but in less disorder. I was told that some of them had received the order to come back to the village, to defend it from the attack of those who were coming from the direction of Torrejón (ours!). I said nothing and felt that one by one our hopes and illusions of the morning were crumbling. The commander-in-chief arrived almost at once.

'If this goes on', he said, 'a machine-gun must be placed at the cross-roads. We'll see then if they dare to retreat.'

The hostile aviation came back once more. It discharged a sweeping fire from machine-guns, and threw down half a ton of lead and iron. The feeling of disorganization increased under the noise of the planes. Through the window I saw my old comrade of the patrol with about fifteen militia drawn up under the trees. They seemed feverish with thirst, hunger and fatigue. They held themselves impassively under the bombardment. The lieutenant came up, and saluting said:

'The section of the Tercero is here at your orders.'

'How many men?'

'Sixteen.'

'They must go and draw up four hundred and fifty yards in front of the light battery. Report to the artillery captain.'

That battery was at the exit from the village. They went off. I saw that they were contented, in spite of everything. Satisfied because they were doing something at the order of someone.

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The commander-in-chief saw that things were getting worse every moment. He went himself to collect the scattered groups, marshalling them, and placing them in positions for starting. At dusk, after a work of several hours under the enemy bombardment, everything was in order again. Some companies were holding the positions they had occupied in the morning, close to Seseña. The tanks had destroyed six of the enemy's light guns and some three companies of infantry. Thanks to these results, it was not a complete disaster. To supply the comrades, who were almost without ammunition and who were weak from thirst, a number of volunteers went with cartridges and water-cans, creeping in the dark, one by one. When they returned, these volunteers brought a prisoner whom our men had captured. He was a youth of eighteen, in a striking state of physical misery, and with a vague suspicion in his looks and his gestures. If he were not crazy, at least he had not complete control of himself. He did not know his name. It was sometime before he could answer questions. He carried in his pocket a letter carefully wrapped up in cardboard from an old cartridge box. He had put on the pieces of cardboard a newspaper folded to preserve them. The letter was addressed to Ceferino Martinez Rius, whom he said was his father. He lived in Salamanca with the rest of his family. I am including the letter here as it has some documental interest (perhaps even those to whom it was addressed may come to read it here!).

Dear parents,

I have always wanted to write to you for several days but I've nowhere to put the paper which gets dirty everywhere. There is a mud of water and blood, and my knees too are dirty and wet. I could write on the back of one of the comrades, but they haven't the patience to wait which shows that they aren't as good comrades as they are called. But now I can write to you, but I can't tell you how, although later on I may tell you. After so much trouble, I don't know now what to tell you, because when I have said 'dear parents' nothing else comes into my head. Life is bad. I am afraid of the dead at night, but during the day I envy them, because



Scenes from the War



Writing to a Sweetheart

DISAPPOINTMENT

although they are so dirty and so knocked to bits, they don't hear or see. I don't envy the wounded, because although they go off, they are still alive and will have to come back here. Now I know what to tell you, but I won't write much, because my memory leaves me and there is a bad smell such as I have never smelt before. It is a foul smell, but sweet. I have put my paper on a dead man, and as his shirt is dirty, it is stained. I have opened his shirt, and have put the paper on his back. The skin is clean, but very cold. It is a strange kind of cold which freezes without being very cold. The paper won't get stained any more, if the postman doesn't let it fall in a puddle, but better dirty than not all, don't you think?

Now don't be glad about this, or about anything else, because you will be wrong. Although my memory is going, I don't forget you, as you are my parents. We had nothing to eat yesterday but to-day they gave us meat with tomatoes. I left the tomato because it looked like blood and smelt like bodies, half sour and half sweet. The smell was in the meat too, but I have forgotten about that already. You yourselves ought to forget about everything and about me too. The best is to forget all about everything for ever. Since José was killed he has been laughing all the time. Shells from the 15.5 fall, and he laughs. The machine-guns fire alongside him and he laughs. That dead man is José the son of don Vicente. He is with us, although he isn't alive. We have to bear his smell, and all the same it can't be borne. That is comradeship.

The war goes well, and everyone says that we'll win soon, but they haven't changed our trench and it is very dirty because we haven't been able to go out of it to relieve ourselves, and that has gone on for twelve days. I wanted to tell you something, but I have forgotten. I'll write it to you another day.

To-day is October 28 (I know the date because they brought newspapers) and I am writing more because I want you to send me pocket-handkerchiefs. A dozen of linen and with my name in a corner so that they won't be stolen. And now I go to my post and so say goodbye. I can't find my helmet but I don't want it, because they got don Vicente's son

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in the head. The helmet is no use for shells, or for bad smells, or for anything. And send me some money because one is nobody here without money, and if I have money in my pocket when I fall, the Moors or those of the Legion will come to find me to get my money. Always that cursed money. Arriba España! Long live our chief!

Your son,

CEFERINO.

I have carried that letter in my pocket and have showed it to many comrades, as it is an interesting revelation of the frame of mind of many of those who form Franco's 'glorious troops', young lads enrolled by force or under the temporary intoxication of proclamations.

That night the situation in Valdemoro was cleared up, thanks to the personal efforts of the commander-in-chief. Three days later the village had to be abandoned, and he had to fall back on Cerro Rojo and Getafe. The troops made a very good defence, but the superiority of the enemy in men and materials was overwhelming. The conditions of the fight may be judged from the fact that the commander of the brigade had to open a way for himself, revolver in hand, and that when they were evacuating the wounded in ambulances, the sanitary convoy found the road in their rear blocked by enemy tanks which opened machine-gun fire.

The cars were able to turn, some of them hit many times, and to come back by the road in front. I cannot yet understand how they got to Aranjuez. It was one of the chances of war. They passed through ground occupied by the enemy. Two minutes before or two minutes later, and it would have been impossible. When the fascists realized what was happening they opened fire with their 7·5 guns on the road, but they did not hit the lorries, which arrived at Aranjuez without more casualties.

We had lost ten miles. From our new positions, Cerro Rojo and Getafe, Madrid still commanded them with gun-fire. If we lost these too, Madrid would be under the fire of the hostile artillery. The martyrdom of Madrid would begin.

And it did begin, on November 10. A grey day with the

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sky clouded. At dusk the first shells began to hurtle through the clear air over Toledo suburb. And on that same night, corps, arms, soldiers, were improvised—and the improvisation had to continue on the following days. Sometimes men had to go without weapons to fill the breaches with their own naked breasts, waiting for rifles left by the dead.

The physiognomy of the city changed completely in a few hours. The few snobs still left in Madrid (although, it was true, packing up) asked in their fright:

‘Is it the end now?’

‘No, on the contrary,’ they were told, ‘now we are beginning to win. And we shall not stop until complete victory.’

As the pleasant snobs did not understand, we explained to them in their own language:

‘Franco, Mussolini and Hitler are active in manœuvre. We are the inertia of reality, but alive and powerful. Against the obstacle of this reality all force will be shattered, all manœuvres come to nothing.’

CHAPTER XXI

WAIT FORTY-EIGHT HOURS

The headquarters of the Militia were established in the mansion of a well-known Spanish aristocrat. In another, quite near to it, the headquarters of the Fifth Regiment. The vibration of motor-cycles, which kept coming to these two buildings from the most distant parts of the periphery of Madrid, marked the nerve-web of the city's defence. The centre no doubt had been displaced from its customary site, but was the nerve-centre ever in the same place?

The stress of the fight one day left the syndicates and the proletarian political parties, concentrated round the lorries laden with arms, then returned to the syndicates and spread over the streets. It had been combined in a single hand in the Ministry of War, and now, under the avalanche of iron and fire which came over us, it kept changing its place from one site to another, restless, seeking solidity and stability. The unknown man of the streets gave it these. The working mason, the printer, the tramway employee. A high military technician, full of responsibility and authority had said: 'Madrid cannot be defended,' and left the city, to go to healthier Valencia. Many people accepted his verdict literally; and some controlled and authorized motor-cars sought 'special missions', and came and went through the environs of Madrid, always going out by the east side, farthest from the enemy's shells. Franco's hordes had already installed their light artillery on Carabanchel Alto. The shells of the heavy artillery, placed farther back, had already destroyed more than one tree in Rosales Avenue, in the West Park; they had blown



Defence of a House



Scenes from the Front

WAIT FORTY-EIGHT HOURS

up houses in Toledo Street and in Moncloa. The hurricane concentrated its fury behind the Palacio de Oriente, and bureaucratic cleverness sought means of obtaining the right to the safe streets of Las Ventas, where the wild anxiety to escape could be appeased. The fangs of the Beast were threatening the entrances of the city streets and the windows and the doors of the outer houses of Madrid facing the country. The Beast flung its steel over the roofs, and at night howled over the chimneys. Part of Madrid moved towards Las Ventas, fled, and did not come back. The great majority of the inhabitants remained, and the artisans and labourers shifted towards the parts most threatened. Just as instinct drove a part of the middle classes to flight, so instinct led the workers and a part of the bourgeoisie towards the guns of the enemy. Whilst the commands were being reformed, the phrase of the highest 'technical expert', now near Valencia, was repeated, 'Madrid is indefensible.' In spite of that, the militia took up positions in Carabanchel, in the Casa de Campo, on the banks of the Manzanares, in good humour;

'The front is now no more than a penny tram-fare off.'

Workers who had not yet mobilized crowded to the offices of the syndicates. They all had the same question: 'Where are the rifles?' But the rifles were nowhere. The only rifles were in the hands of the troops forced back on Madrid by the enemy. We had no more tanks than those which made their first effort with us at Seseña. Our artillery was very inferior to that of the enemy. We had to consider the nature of the mechanized attack against the city, and what new form our defence would take, for now it had left the wide horizons of the open country, the play of perspectives and distances. Now we had to combine asphalt, street crossings, paving-stones and chimneys. How does one fight on roof-tops and at street corners? But that was not a great problem, because every minute taught us. The enemy was pushing fiercely in Carabanchel, in the West Park, in Moncloa, in the University City, and was being held back by our hands, by our naked breasts, barring the streets with fresh corpses.

At the Toledo bridge one day the following harangue was heard:

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'Forty men are required. It is better that only unmarried men should go, with no children. For don't think that a single one of these forty will come back. All of them are going to remain there. We shall need their bodies to entrench ourselves.'

About a hundred came out, and forty communists were chosen from them.

The commandants hurried in and out of the headquarters of the Fifth Regiment. Most of them had no better idea of the state of affairs than was given them by their high-strung courage and intuition. As yet exact information was lacking, and no regular lines could be established. Fighting was taking place all along the west side of Madrid without any initiative except that of the militia leaders. We were in need of mechanical material. Rifles were very scarce, and there was a shortage of munitions. All the militia who had been assigned to work in the rearguard had left their pacific duties and had gone to the barracks and to the front. The rifles of 'Cultura Popular' had left the corners of the libraries and were seeking duty in the front line. All the other organizations, which so far had been engaged in civilian duties, had taken the same course. The young president of 'Cultura Popular' had put himself under the orders of the war committee of 'United Socialist Youth'. With the few arms they were able to collect three thousand more men had been equipped, but the bulk of the fighting population of Madrid were still without weapons.

Madrid had assumed a passionate and courageous air. The men went about the streets in silence. But no one lost his calm.

Motor-cycles and light cars with the commandants kept entering and leaving the headquarters of the Fifth Regiment.

On the tables were packets of dynamite made up into weights, whose effect on tanks had been proved by Coll, a heroic sailor. Telephones were being used without cease.

'How many men are available?

A militia lieutenant glanced at a paper wearily:

'Eight hundred in the barracks at N. Fifteen hundred at V. Six hundred at R.'

'Armed?'

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‘No.’

‘How many with arms?’

‘Three hundred have just arrived from X.’

‘X’ was a position on another front. These three hundred went off to fill a gap in Carabanchel. Three hundred others without arms followed them. They got their rifles from the hands of the dead or wounded. To those who went off in long grey or brown files down Toledo Street, clinging to the walls of the deserted street, under the shells, they told the conditions under which they went to the front. No one hesitated.

‘If we can hold them back for two days’, said the staff, ‘all will be saved.’

Many of the volunteers had stuck in their belts a large knife from the kitchen of their house. It was all they carried. They went to face the finest war material of Germany and Italy—‘if we can keep them back for two days’. But there was no pathos in any of their faces. Everything was being done in a simple, restrained and natural way. The worker who went to the front line with empty hands, or who in the darkness of the night crawled outside the trenches with his pick on his shoulder to fix barbed wire, or to mine an unfortified breach, kept his usual civilian spirit. I saw none of the wild gestures, heard none of the spasmodic cheers which seem obligatory in a regular army, and which form the moral support of the fascists. No one lapsed into affectedness or theatricalism. Everything—even death itself, kept being simple and natural. Every one relied on his own resources as in civil life. ‘I know where to find staples to fix the wire,’ said a workman of a gang for entrenching, whilst the battle was raging.

And off he went to a shop to get them, coming back with them at full speed. The war was the private business of everyone. I thought that the fascists could not say that of their men. To work in the trenches, the Madrid artisans gave as much confidence and interest as to the building of their own houses. With the money that someone had in his pocket, as if they were buying cigarettes, they bought maps of Madrid in the bookshops with which to organize the defence. A youth, Commandant Castro, bent over them with a metric scale and

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a red and blue pencil, marking lines. The cannonade was shaking the windows of the house.

‘What does Oliveira say?’

Oliveira was in command of the militia at Toledo bridge.

‘That tanks are slipping through, and are descending by Carabanchel, towards the river. He is asking for more dynamite.’

‘Has Galan reached the Casa de Campo?’

‘Yes. Four lots of Tercio infantry are attacking us there.’

‘And what about University City?’

‘They seem to have taken from us the Casa de Velazquez.’

‘But the Casa de Velazquez is nearer here.’

A silence full of doubts followed. The ‘Campesino’ went back with his men to Boadilla. He was asking for machine-guns, but there weren’t any and he went out slamming the door.

The cannonade continued to rage outside.

Castro laid down the metric measure with which he had been working tranquilly on the map, as if he were doing an exercise for an examination at the Institute, and declared in his usual jovial voice:

‘Within forty-eight hours, if we are not all under the ground, Madrid will have been saved.’

The ‘Campesino’ came back and turning rapidly on his heels, for it amused him to swing a picturesque cape of the kind which the lieutenants of Girgis Khan must have worn, pointed to two machine-rifles which were in a corner.

‘And these, what are these doing here?’

The slamming of the door was still echoing in the room. From between his coalblack whiskers his Roman nose protruded; his large eyes, half tender and half fierce, his wide and sunburnt face were all the features of a strong man.

‘Aren’t you going to give me one of these rifles?’

As nobody replied, he took a rifle and went off with it. Just as he was at the door someone called to him, and the ‘Campesino’ turned round with a comical pretence of rage.

‘Good Lord, we aren’t going to take it away from you. But put down that one, which is damaged, and take the other.’

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The 'Campesino' went into the lobby, gave it to the driver of his car, came back, threw at us a comically theatrical farewell, and went off. He returned to his sector, which he had left two hours before. Every day they were repulsing three or four mechanized attacks with tanks, armoured cars, and German shock troops. Heroism was as much part of 'Campesino's' nature as his beard, and he kept at the work of war as tenaciously and as lightly as a child keeps to a game. The 'Campesino' will be one of the typical memories in the history of our war.

The telephone kept calling all through the conversations and excited dialogues:

'Two thousand men, yes, certainly, but not a single rifle.'

'What's that?'

'And what do you want me to do? Unless I draw pictures of them on a bit of paper.'

And the dialogue ended with the perpetual phrase: 'Wait forty-eight hours.'

As there was no way of solving the matter, they turned to jests:

'That's O.K. by us, but you ought to tell Franco too.'

Forty-eight hours of waiting, without arms, behind our front lines—a man, a rifle—under the heavy hammer of the enemy artillery, under the German and Italian aeroplanes. At the termini of the metro railway nearest to the fronts our reserves certainly were well protected; but alongside them, the ambulances, the groans of those with fractured bones, the stertorous gasps of the dying, affected their spirits even more than the bombardment. From the headquarters of the Fifth Regiment they kept replying to all the entreaties, to all the protests, the same words:

'Wait forty-eight hours.'

We imagined that the war material which was to save Madrid was coming by road and rail, by forced stages, shining with copper and steel, mouths of guns protected by waterproof cloth, axles well-greased, and we longed to see all these in the defence lines of Madrid, covered with mud, camouflaged, vomiting out steel. Until they came, it was necessary to face everything unprotected, and, if we were wounded, to

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try to fall where our weapon could be picked up easily by some comrade.

Silent processions of artisans, of labourers, of employees, passed along closely under the walls of the deserted last streets of the western suburbs, by Toledo Street, by Ferraz Street, by Vallehermoso, by the slope of San Vicente, always enfiladed by the enemy artillery.

They walked taciturnly but serenely, with empty hands. The enemy aeroplanes came, wary, laden with crime. The columns pressed to the walls more closely, and went on their way. The streets of these suburbs were deserted, but the houses were inhabited as usual. Sometimes after a shell had burst on a roof, a working-class woman could be seen to open a window and hang out linen to dry. The aeroplanes discharged their bombs at random, without definite objectives. The bombs, of two hundred or four hundred pounds (or even of a thousand like the bomb thrown on the Puerta del Sol), penetrated the houses, sometimes going through four or five stories, and exploded within, bringing down the inner walls and leaving the house like a tragic set of bookshelves. Three, four or six families disappeared in the litter. And even in the midst of the noise of the catastrophe, wrathful fists were raised to the sky, whilst the aeroplanes droned high above. Another stimulus to hate, another reason for closing the ranks, for enduring here, advancing there. To save Madrid, traversed day and night by the funerals of children. To plunge the traitors into such misery as their own hordes produced, those hordes which killed from a distance under cover of the night. Madrid was creating for herself a new spirit (sprung from the open wound, the newly dug grave, the dead eyes of the widow); Madrid lived in its prologue of a new epic, and wore the sublime with the ease and simplicity which custom brings. Facing the terror, it showed its new spirit in the simplicity of its heroism, and the quiet and taciturn expression which only quickened to make once more a tranquil gesture of confidence.

‘Why are you so certain of victory?’ a young militiaman asked an old comrade in the street as they were clearing the wreckage of a house in ruins. ‘According to you, victory will



To the Front! Mother and Son

WAIT FORTY- EIGHT HOURS

come of itself, even if we do nothing.' The old man pointed with his arm to a row of litters waiting for their load of pain to be taken to the ambulances.

'Because of all that,' he said.

He could not conceive that people capable of such things could ever triumph. The old man was thus stating his faith in the moral basis of every normal biological event. (Normal being understood in the sense of what preserves and affirms the rational basis of human relations.) He held that that was always to be reckoned with.

His faith, however, was not absolute. He made the reserve:

'If those who are doing all these things were to win, it would be as if the whole world were committing suicide.'

But the old man had arguments more concrete than his intuitions.

'What happened in the European War? When I saw what the Germans were doing, I said: that cannot be; they will lose. What did happen? They lost, and their barons and great capitalists were ruined, and the workers got better wages and rose in the social scale. No one could prevent it. In France, in England, everywhere, after a spate of blood and greed, whether they like it or not, life reasserts itself on better lines. Those who did not eat, now eat. Those who were of no account, have their place. Those who were everything and who wished to deny the sane purpose of life by accumulating more power, were crushed in some countries, and in others sank to a lower level. Don't forget that, because you are very young and have not my experience. One has to live as life requires, or to shoot oneself.'

We, according to him, were obedient to life. And in the end life always asserts itself. The old militiaman, out of his experience, had created a philosophy of his own which coincided with the Marxian synthesis.

Franco represented death. And death once again has to be beaten 'if the sun is going to continue shining', as the old man said. 'But there are many people in the world who have a fear of life.' That last phrase is a good definition of the policy of Hitler and Mussolini. People who fear life and wish to deny it. The old man went on delivering his views and put down his

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shovel to lift a litter into the ambulance, which had just come.

The shells from the 15.5 guns passed whistling, and burst on the roofs, on the streets already covered (in all the western section) with broken glass and smashed shop signs. But the long columns of reinforcements kept advancing, silently. Almost all of them were walking as in times of peace they would take a walk or go to the cinema. Some of them carried a folded and rolled-up blanket which they had brought from home. When a shell fell close, the column pressed against the wall for a moment, and then went on quietly. They had to take care to keep boys of fourteen or fifteen from slipping in amongst them. The officers kept turning out lads who said they were eighteen, but when at last they confessed their real age, they added:

‘I could be a runner’; they would insist almost weeping, ‘certainly I’d do for that.’

But they turned them out. The militia patted their heads with rough tenderness and smiled with pride, thinking ‘They are our young brothers, our comrades of to-morrow.’

Between Rosales and Moncloa there was a large building in which, in those days, we were concentrating volunteers to form the fourth shock battalion. Leaves razed by the shells from the trees often fell down in the courtyard. Workmen kept coming in with their records signed by the syndicates, and were formed into companies under militiamen seconded from other fronts. The newcomers belonged to the most varied occupations, and although they were being mobilized for the first time, and had to arrive through streets raked by artillery, often with shells exploding over their heads, they came in excellent spirits. The roll of the battalion was filled within twenty-four hours. In the open air of the courtyards they were drawn up, advanced crouching on the ground, or were drilled in close formation. Often they telephoned to the general staff office, ‘Are there arms?’ Always they got the reply, ‘Wait,’ and always with the addition, ‘How many men?’ ‘Six hundred.’ ‘Good ones?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Do they understand rifles?’ ‘Yes, we have thirty with which we have taught all of them.’ ‘Are they dynamiters?’ ‘No.’ ‘We shall send you



Madrid Front: Moving to the Line of Fire

WAIT FORTY-EIGHT HOURS

a section at once. Divide them up well, and wait for the arms.'

Machine-guns were sounding within a few hundred yards of the barracks, their mechanical fire diversified by hand-grenades, whilst mortars opened their deep and sombre cauldrons. With a clamour of that kind behind our walls, harangues or phrases were not needed to raise morale. Every one who had come was a hero, only waiting his opportunity to prove it. The officers confined themselves to giving practical advice on how to take advantage of the ground, the value of cross-fire, the radius of action of hand-grenades. Sometimes a shell came rasping the air and some threw themselves on the ground, others sidled against the nearest wall. The shell burst, and we could see all round faces contracted with anger. They did not change colour, and certainly not one of them had a rapid pulse. The officers, some of them twenty years old, of bourgeois stock—students or employees already with a brilliant career in the war—took advantage of things like that to remind them that 'it was all noise', and that the danger was slight if you kept your head, and saw where they were coming and took cover. The theoretical explanations were based on experiences of the most pathetic and concrete kind. 'The one that has just fired', said a young captain, 'is a mortar. Mortars and machine-guns don't make so much noise as guns and aeroplanes, but they are more dangerous. As for tanks and armoured cars, they are only monsters to frighten children. And like monsters they have a disadvantage; they are blind. Don't forget that you have two advantages over them; your eyes and your ability to make use of any crevice in the ground. It isn't difficult to wait for these monsters; all you need is good nerve. When a tank has come within a hundred yards, it is almost harmless. At that distance the only danger is to be crushed under it, and to avoid that you have only to throw a simple hand-grenade under it. Such a bomb paralyzes them.' All these lessons they were going to put in practice on the ground itself, within a few hours. At the end of these lessons, always the same question: 'When are you going to give us rifles?'

When night fell, the arms had not yet come. They were all

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about to lie down when the telephone rang. The night was very dark. There was no moon. The cold of Castille tightened the window bolts. The streets were very dark. Some little pocket torch shone and went out rapidly at doubtful street crossings. At night the fighting in the Park del Oeste, Moncloa, and the University City sent out its explosions, its unbroken clamour of tempest, much more clearly. The inexperienced militia, hearing it all, believed that the enemy had entered Madrid and that they would have them at the gates of the barracks. The officers explained to them the difference between the noises of the day and noises by night.

At eleven o'clock we were called by telephone:

'Have you thirty men with arms?'

'Yes.'

'They are to come out, equipped, under an officer, to take the metro railway at Ríos Rosas, and go to Anton Martín where they will be given orders.'

'Will they come back to-night or stay there?'

'They will come back. We'll return them within two hours.'

As Anton Martín was a point of strategical value for Las Delicias and the left side of the Toledo bridge, every one thought that they were going to the front line, and we did not undeceive them, wishing to see how they would respond. Thirty were asked for, but more than a hundred offered themselves. We had to make a selection, taking those required by their numbers, and those who were left behind in the barracks were much disappointed. When, after the selection, they broke ranks, a man of five and twenty years came to me, his eyes diffused with tears:

'Why haven't I gone?' he asked me.

I tried to explain to him that only thirty were required, and that he would go on the first opportunity, but he kept protesting, really offended:

'But this is the second time that they have done it to me.'

He was taking it as a matter of self-respect. He was so disturbed by this rebuff (the second time they were doing it), that I had to explain to him that the thirty men were not going to the front, but to keep order at a meeting in the Cinema Monumental. I was able to quieten him only by that infor-

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mation. I went out with them. In the same street we came on a dense column drawn up along the front of the houses. I heard talking in French, in German and in Italian. Some of the comrades began to sing 'The Red Flag', and the Italian anti-fascists followed at once. The Germans raised their fists and shouted out 'Rot Front'. When our eyes became accustomed to the darkness, we noticed their leather coats, their rifles, their complete equipment—even a small pick or shovel on their backs. The column, which had stopped for a moment, marched on again. The militia raised their fists and cried out 'Rot Front'.

That column furnished the Spanish militia with a splendid example of international proletarian solidarity. The column went off towards University City. The civilian emotion of my comrades ceased with the sound of their marching. All would have gone with them gladly; all wished afterwards to have them as companions at the fronts. It was a clear and living proof of the universality of our cause. The proof made us proud, and gave our efforts a breath of grandeur still more intense.

I went back to the barracks. The captain of the first company was in the room we had taken for the staff. He had half a bottle of good brandy and two cups of coffee and milk with plenty of sugar. Quite a festivity! As we went to bed late, always waiting for the unexpected, we talked. The captain was a young doctor in philosophy and literature. He had a delicate and peaceful appearance and wore large tortoise-shell spectacles. Everything about him was smooth and polished. In the field he almost gave the impression of being a wealthy young sportsman who had not happened to shave for several days. Certainly he had no aspect of the soldier about him, and the war had not changed him at all. He had the character of a drawing-room intellectual. And yet his company was a compact and well-disciplined unit. He spoke to them in a polite style, full of subtle suggestions with no cheap effects, and no insults to the enemy, and got splendid results. When I saw him at the head of his company, I realized that working-men had a more highly developed faculty of recognizing intelligence and spiritual qualities. 'On the other side,' I thought,

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‘that man would never have been made a captain, as they would have kept him down with blows and violence and curses.’

‘What do you think about all this?’ he asked me.

Outside, the forest of rifles and machine-guns was burning. Shells close to us were making the pavements vibrate.

‘I believe they will not enter.’

We were silent for a moment. We were not too sure.

‘And if they do enter,’ I added, leaving an opening for the possibility of surprise or the crushing of one of the sectors, which was then far from unlikely, ‘if they do enter, they won’t get out.’

That seemed more probable at the time. My friend understood that.

‘I see’, he went on, ‘that something is changing in all the men about me. They are becoming different. Perhaps, until now, when they went to the front they thought it was to consolidate a triumph already won. Now it is another matter. Although the word is unpleasant, and perhaps does not exactly express what one wishes to say, it could be said that they are going in the spirit of suicide. And it ought to be the spirit of war.’

I thought of the comrade who at Guadarrama, in the early days, had said, under the bombardment:

‘Everyone to his own job. That they kill us is not our business. We haven’t to worry about that; the enemy sees to it, even a little too much. Everyone to his own job.’

I saw the spirit of war in those words. My companion did not agree. In them he recognized only a ‘physical adaptation to war’. In the spirit of war there were both blindness and fatalism. ‘I have seen it’, he said ‘in nearly all the comrades. All have had the same idea in their heads, or, without thinking about it, have become convinced that it is necessary to give up illusions and to face death, knowing that it will be almost impossible to avoid it. Only if we face life in that spirit can everything be saved? But no one thinks of saving himself. If he does not happen to die, he is saved.’

It was more exact, certainly.

‘And you? Do you expect to get out of all this with your life?’

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The question, during war, is improper. I put it only on that one occasion, and it has never been put to me, nor have I heard it asked. I asked it then because I wished to hear what he would say.

'Yes,' he said, 'of course. And you too. We expect to be saved, and if we did not think so, we could not fight. We need the conviction of saving ourselves, and you and I both have it. Not to escape death physically, but to save all that we have in our imagination. Although nothing or nobody can take that conviction from us (it is the confidence of victory) it is sometimes rather confused in our minds with physical safety. What I mean', he said in conclusion, 'is that we cannot have the animal fear of death because we know that the essential (what we are here for, and for what we have gone to the fronts) can never die.'

We sipped our coffee. He lighted a cigarette and added:

'You are the same to-day as you were on the first day. I also. We have no need to change.'

We agreed that a suicide is not a person in despair, as is generally thought, but quite the contrary. He is a man in whose soul all hopes, stronger and more urgent than ever, have rebelled. He is able to laugh, make a jest of the gravest tragedies, seem more self-possessed than ever. But to a good observer there will always be visible a hesitation between two glances, an excessive emphasis in gestures, a tremor when the tone of the voice changes, especially when it is lowered. That is the 'picture' of the suicide. And all that seems to happen to a man at the highest and most tense moment of his actions and of his thoughts. My friend concluded:

'To achieve so important a thing as the saving of the liberties of the people not only in Spain but in all the world it is necessary to reach that marvellous state of tension. We have to reach out beyond our own lives, in the grandeur of our effort, with one foot already "on the other side".'

Second-lieutenant Hontoria came in, a very large peasant with a childish expression. He told me that the 'committee of the company' had been formed and asked if we had been told the name of the political commissary of the battalion. I

told him that we had not. Hontoria had been at the front since the first day of the war, and had been promoted because of really extraordinary exploits, at which he himself always seemed the most surprised. He wore in a rough belt at his side a butcher's knife, broad and sharp, with a black handle. It was clear that he had hunted through all the shops in the working-class suburbs, and had argued much with the shopkeepers to get that knife at a reasonable price. In the trenches he would use the machine-gun, the mortar, the rifle or the bomb, but he carried the knife because where the mechanical implements of modern war could not reach, the primitive force of his arm might be successful.

He took a cup of coffee, sat down, and listened to us for a little, sleepily. When he seemed really to be asleep, he suddenly opened his eyes, scratched his leg and turning to me, asked:

'Is it true that you write books?'

'Yes. Why?'

He seemed to go to sleep again, but once more he opened his eyes:

'Then you must have books in your house, eh?' And added with a sigh, 'How grand it must be to have books in the house.'

The captain and I looked at him in surprise. He went on, with jealous eyes:

'I suppose you have a dozen books, or more, eh?'

My friend, laughing, told him that I had more than a hundred dozen. The second-lieutenant did not believe that there were so many books in the world, and took it as a joke. Then in a mysterious way, dwelling on every word, he told us:

'Once I read a book'; and then silently he nodded his head and said: 'What a great thing a book is!'

The captain and I listened to him enchanted. We asked him if he had not read more than one, and he replied with an explanation that in his opinion compensated for everything; he had read the same book eighteen times. It was called *The Son of Night*, or *The Dream of the Lost One*.

'It was as thick as this,' he said, indicating the size of a church Bible. 'What an education in that book! Haven't you read it?'

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We told him that we had not read it, and it was our good fortune, because he related it all to us completely and literally. The heroine had a son without having been married, and at once a crowd of enemies came against her, denying her bread or any social consideration, for having had it. She had to fly, and one night she left her house and quitted the city on foot. The country was covered with snow, and the mother had no shoes. She was unable to feed the child because 'her milk had dried as a result of her sufferings', and the father had refused to acknowledge her. He was the viscount of Beauchamp (he pronounced every letter singly); and when she had been walking in the snow for half an hour, she heard wolves howling, and the pack came at her. When the wolves had formed a circle round her and were just going to rush on her——

'There was a shot,' interrupted my friend.

The second-lieutenant pointed with a finger:

'That one has read the book,' he said.

We assured him that he had not, and he went on with his narrative. It was true about the shot. A hunter, the marquis de la Rochebrune, happened to be passing. He killed some of the wolves and frightened away the others, so saving the mother and child. That marquis was an enemy of the viscount. The lieutenant described the physical appearance of each as if he had seen them. His words had much more imagination and more beauty probably than the book itself. Sometimes, speaking of the place where one of the events had happened, he added: 'it must be near Sigüenza, because I have seen there a house among trees with a large stone porch and a coat of arms just as the book describes.' He hated Beauchamp so much, and had so much admiration for Rochebrune, that when he was describing the duel which they fought on the banks of the Ebro ('It must have been', he added, 'near Tortosa, because I have a friend there who has told me that the Ebro passes by it'), he rose from his chair, put his left hand on his hip, and believing himself to be the marquis, said gallantly to his enemy: 'Aim well, Sir viscount. Do not let your hand shake, for my heart does not tremble.' Then the marquis awaited the shots, and when his enemy fired, contented

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himself with a slight movement of his head to the right or to the left, to avoid the bullet, as he knew from the direction of the pistol the path which the shot must take. The bullet passed by him, grazing his locks, and finally when his turn came to fire, Rochebrune pointed his pistol to the sky and fired, because he with five others (whose names and family histories he gave us) had sworn never to shed human blood. We did not laugh at the comic side of the lieutenant's recital, because we were really touched by his respect for the book—the only one that he had ever read.

When he had finished his account, which he had condensed for us, he exclaimed:

'What I learned from that book!'

And in case he had not made himself clear enough, he assured us:

'All that I am,' he pointed to his star as lieutenant, which he had gained by a heroism which surpassed imagination, 'I learned from that book.'

When he left us, we continued talking about him. Lieutenant Hontoria, a worthy peasant who had not left his farming until the militia came, when he joined them to defend his village, had assimilated the gentlemanly idealism of the marquis of Rochebrune, and no one could say that in fighting he had not remembered the marquis. My friend, quite overcome, exclaimed: 'What influence a book may have!' The lieutenant was disciplined, had good sense, and treated as brothers his comrades, amongst whom were artisans and educated employees, all of whom equally admired his cold courage.

'What Spain would be,' said my friend, 'if men like him, free from the atavism of caste, strong, of virgin brain, were to be educated and reached the top? What surprises they would bring to us in the arts, in politics, and in science!'

It was one of the results which we hoped to get from victory.

The guns kept sounding outside. Shrapnel kept coming over the barracks, and in the dark, with the shutters closed, the importance of these shells seemed greater, although by day they did nothing except strip the trees. My friend in-

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sisted in continuing to comment on the lieutenant. He had seen him fighting many times, he had seen his relations with the militia, always intelligent, and his recent revelations about 'the book' perplexed him, revealed him in a new light.

That night the high roofs of Madrid turned into observatories. The buildings of twenty or thirty stories, up through which during peace swift lifts rushed with a whistling noise, with roofs open to the moon, with indirect lighting, silent waiters, table-lamps always with white moths fluttering madly round them, were uncarpeted, with their cement floors cleanly washed and cold under a moon which probably for many years would not light up another love-scene. In the high salon the orchestras were replaced by rangefinders with their two antennae, which, when swung round on their socket made an almost human gesture of pride. Fifteen or twenty observatories linked together, were beginning their work. These chilly heights, without the human warmth of the streets, whose only share in the life of the city was a mauve or red reflection from the street signs, blazing out business announcements, love potions, costly scents and American orchestras, were now turned into watchtowers of destruction. The prostitutes had emigrated, the sparkling wines of France were done with, and the light music had been replaced by the dialogues of the guns, rangefinders and telephones, figures and place-names, calibres and co-ordinates. How many times have I seen from such heights on the roofs of Madrid, the plain all round greedy and arid, the distant mills of La Mancha spinning out drowsy afternoon dreams, that country which sends fresh breezes by night, from far off (from the Escorial), almost marine. These high roofs above the high stories of cement, with their grey turrets striped with steel bars—ladders leading nowhere although they gave the illusion of new towers of Babel—these high roofs now kept vigil over the slumbers of our reserve battalions. From them was directed the fire of our heavy guns, large, grey, long-necked like giraffes. The roofs, sweethearts of the north wind and the jazz band, without forgetting their frivolity, had covered themselves with the grey helmets of soldiers. Under them comrades still trim, perhaps shaved every day, because they were far from the

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barbed wire and the red-stained mud of the trenches, did accounts and sent out telephone messages. Our eyes, limited to the right and the left by the streets, by the trees of the Casa de Campo, by the timbers and the heaped earth of the trenches, trusted to these other eyes which put at our service the distant perspectives, the clear diaphanous horizons. All the militia have dreamed sometimes about these roofs when they seemed to be in the last extremity, as, in old-fashioned novels, dying persons think about their sweethearts or their mothers.

At the end of the first day (November 7, that day!) the high roofs, geometrically straight, cold to the north and hot to the south, were directing the firing of more than three hundred guns. They were old guns of 15·5, 10·5 and 7·5. We did not know of others much larger and much smaller, which were 'on the way'.

At night enemy shells of all calibres boomed over the windows and the chimneys. Mothers did not know what to tell their children, awakened and frightened. The dreams of their little wooden beds had flown away, and now resounded in the iron of the balconies. What efforts of imagination the parents must have made to comfort the children, to explain to them something which might come at any moment (in that familiar chain of children's Why's?) and could not be explained.

Towards the University City, towards the Casa de Campo, towards Carabanchel, the workers kept flowing, alert to the need for heroism. Instead of arms for the battle, they had well-tempered hearts, and the hope of getting arms some day. Forty of Durruti's column died as they were leaving our barracks under the enemy's bombarding planes, which came over even at night. It happened to these Catalan comrades—in fact nearly all of them were from Aragón, from the Huesca Front—at dawn. They had slept in our barracks, and were going down to the Park del Oeste just before daybreak. Forty were left under the trees, with their skulls broken. The others went on to the front line, hoping for the rifles of those who might fall, or from convoys coming by road. The survivors asked their question with their eyes, but always got the same reply: 'Wait forty-eight hours.'

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The worst was that the intimation became a habit, and next day it was still 'wait forty-eight hours', and three days later they still had to wait. Of course the reserves without arms had already filled the vacant places in the front line, and, unfortunately, they had arms, taken from dead comrades.

CHAPTER XXII

WE STILL WAIT

In Carabanchel, in Casa de Campo, a large park more than four miles wide, and in the University City, we were well fortified and the position was perhaps as safe as in Guadarrama. The whole secret for the one side or the other was to keep examining this security until they found or were able to produce artificially the conditions for manœuvre. That is what P.'s battery and our troops at Peguerinos could have done at Guadarrama, if the phantasms of the rear—the incalculables of the head offices—would have authorized us. Fortunately the commands had been changed for some time, and their direct and permanent touch with the fronts prevented the phantasms of 'misunderstanding' and mistakes to come between us. General Miaja had become the soul of the defence of Madrid.

Moreover the fronts had very different characters. Even in the lines nearest to Madrid we had the following centres of battle; a working-class suburb of small houses of one or two stories (Carabanchel), in whose irregular streets the machine-guns sang. A very large enclosed park (the Casa de Campo) with a lake in the centre between the opposing lines, and lastly the University City; a great limestone plain with wide asphalted avenues and massive buildings with rows of windows; the Faculty of Pharmacy, of Philosophy and Literature, of Medicine, the Clinical Hospital. A small city separated from Madrid, laid out on a definite plan. In each of these sectors the fight had a different character. Our positions nearly everywhere were very close to theirs. In the first days the

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enemy put all his Moors and regulars in Carabanchel. Our machine-guns hunted them. They had to send light armoured cars to consolidate certain positions; and some of these were destroyed by our men of reckless courage, following the example of the first of these, Coll, a sailor in the service-corps of the Ministry of Marine, who destroyed one tank and made another three retreat damaged, with nothing but his rifle strapped to his back and his belt full of hand-grenades. His example spread. At that time we had no mechanical material. We were in want of artillery, anti-tank guns, and rifles for attacking armoured cars. Everything that was done was a heroic feat. In the Casa de Campo several battalions of fascist legionaries made the attacks. They were supported by Italian tanks, such as the two which our great Cornejo captured with his revolver and bombs. In the University City Franco's assaults were made by equal numbers of Moors from Africa and 'white Moors' from Berlin. When our International Brigade arrived, they occupied part of the University City. Then Durruti's column reinforced them. In the early mornings when each band sniffed at the enemy camp to see what new smell had come with the new day, German songs could sometimes be heard from the enemy trenches—melancholy songs of the misty north, to which our men replied with others, also German and political, ending always with the words 'Rot Front', which Hans Beimler shouted out as he fell.

From the moment when everyone saw the enemy in front of his house everything changed. 'The only way to save the Republic, democracy and the liberties of the people,' was repeated on all sides, 'is to be ready to lose everything in battle. If we think of life first, perhaps we may save it, but without doubt we shall not save the cause of the people.' Everyone understood that. Women pushed their husbands and their sons to the front. They themselves vied with each other in carrying well-sugared coffee to the lines at dawn. No one knew where they got it, but dozens of women, wrapped in their shawls, went at dawn, under the shells, to our posts, wrangled with our sentinels of the second line, and reached some post connected with the first line.

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'Take it, sons,' they would say, handing over with great content a couple of litres of coffee.

The defence of Madrid, counting on the enthusiastic and unanimous aid of the whole population, which was never held back by terror of the bombardments, was assured. The way was closed as it was closed in Guadarrama, in Somosierra, in Peguerinos, in Aragón and in Andalucía—without the forced mobilization of a single soldier—with volunteers. It is astonishing that a month and a half after the attack on Madrid began—when Franco confessed to have lost 18,000 men, we had not yet forced a single man to mobilize. It was voluntarism, the spontaneous movement to the front of workers, peasants, and very many young men of the smaller bourgeoisie, without other requisition than printed manifestos and propaganda leaflets. That is the most significant of all the verdicts which future historians will have to make.

The front of the Casa de Campo was joined to that of the University City by the trenches in the Park del Oeste. This sector is one of the most beautiful to be found in any city in the world. In the background the blue sierra with its snowy peaks. The Park of the Oeste—hilly, green, the sky almost hidden by spreading poplars and tall pines—has a rather melancholy, but impressive air in times of peace. It was the kind of melancholy that is due not to an inherent weakness, but to an excess of vigour and strength unutilized, purposeless, wasted. The kind of melancholy which, in a strong man, disappears with love and its consummation. By the second day of the battle, the Park del Oeste had been entrenched and fortified. There, as in the Casa de Campo (the old hunting-park of kings), every foot of trench was watered with blood even before it had been dug, although, once finished, the trenches were impassable valleys. On the first day men fought by creeping on the ground, dodging the enemy from tree to tree. Barral, the sculptor, a political commissary, fell there, never to rise again. García Maroto, a talented artist and writer, also a political commissary, was shot in the groin. There also fell hundreds of heroes, holding their posts, whilst other heroes, of shovel and pick, with no weapons except their brawny muscles dug trenches like graves, stretched

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them in zig-zags, and made communicating links between them. And still the echo of General L.'s words sounded in our ears: 'Madrid is indefensible. It will fall in a few hours!'

In the trenches, comrades from Aragón fraternized with those of Madrid, and anti-fascist Germans and Italians with Andalucians. The army of the People was improving its organization. The service corp was working as perfectly as the conditions permitted, and everyone had learned the importance of obeying his officer, not doing anything except with his knowledge; they had learned also the usefulness of a tree-trunk or a plank across the trench, supporting sand-bags. They were as skilled in attack as the most expert soldiers, and were as cunning in taking shelter as old moles. Franco saw that he could not capture Madrid, and set himself to destroy it.

A million of human beings awaited death day and night, death which might come unexpectedly from the artillery on the treacherous horizons, from the aeroplanes in the insecure sky; sleeping under the torment of the machine-guns; living with the droning of the aeroplanes in their heads. Franco could not capture Madrid and set himself to destroy it. To destroy the capital of Spain—to destroy it only because he knew that never would it be his—he brought German and Italian aeroplanes and pilots and paid for them with pieces of the national territory. What sort of patriotic sentiment is this? If one's country is not the driving force of the volunteers of the People to save their liberties, what else could the country be? We wish a fatherland that is strong, free, and open to the development of all its possibilities. Franco and his supporters have pledged the fatherland in order to put the people under the iron rule of German and Italian political imperialism. But behind all this there is something not only vile but also grotesque; the figure of Franco, a soldier of moderate ability, ambitious and fantastic, as stupid as his brother Ramón, the hero of the 'portentous' flight to Buenos Aires. Franco, the general, was ready to plunge Spain—he has already drowned half of it in blood—into misery and death from the vanity of a press newsmonger. From a petty and corrupt ambition that the black Spain—

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feudal, monarchical, of moneylenders and nuns—stimulates and exploits. But in the end Franco will have been no more than the Turk's head which received all the blows. History will show us that before long. He began to destroy Madrid, which he could never have hoped to rule, as otherwise he would not have filled it with an indignation, a legacy of hate that centuries cannot destroy, shattering, with iron blows, the skulls and the breasts of hundreds and hundreds of children and women.

Dead children line the streets with death, with pale shadows, with broken dreams of water and of light, with quenched laughter. The joy of sunrise has been absorbed by the heaped bodies of dead children, dissolved in blood, and by red and blue pools of spilt brains. That was the glory of Franco. Hundreds of women proclaim it without cries, old men with their arms in slings, old men who after having worked sixty years in the service of Franco's 'inspirers and adulators' and having put in his hands and those of other generals swords bought with a part of their own wages, received, at the end of their lives, when they could no longer protect themselves by flight, blows from these same swords, in the form of shells from guns and aeroplanes. The glories of Franco can be written best in the cemeteries. His bards will be the executioners who have done his dreadful work, the brave assassins of manacled men, of women dragged to the firing-wall, the creators of hordes of child beggars. The glories of Franco will flourish over common grave-pits and dung-pounds!

On that day, when night had come, a heavy attack on my sector was opened, and I had to go to the front to join my men. An officer came with me. It was eleven o'clock. We went through the dark streets under the bombardment. For the first time we heard the 32·0 guns, and their shells came noisily over us at intervals. A doubtful sky, silver-lined clouds, then the moon of a summer dream, serene in the indifferent night. The shells burst and wounded me to the heart. I am not a native of Madrid, but Madrid is my town, my home. Its streets, its corners, its squares, are all familiar, and in each of them some most happy or most unhappy moment of my life has set its seal. I love Madrid, the only European city where

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I have seen perspectives open to the sublime, the only city in which the refinements of civilization have not spread a monotonous perfection but have left dreams and ambitions sharply individual, and which in its crisp air and light sky is wide open to the inspiration of the impossible and the stupendous. A city set in blue sierras and high plains, of which the genius is harmony and daintiness, as in Velazquez or Lope de Vega. Where the monster plays with children in the Retiro Park and goes to the fair with a cardboard whistle between his lips! I love Madrid! its Rosales or its Moncloa Park. In this poisoned autumn, worse than all the difficulties and dangers, was the poisoning of my dreams.

One day I came back from Moncloa Plaza and went to the barracks close by. The suburb had already received the stamp of the war. How soft and indefinite is the pain of the deserted and damaged houses and streets, lost not in infinite blue horizons but in that other infinite, where there are broken men whose flesh, mingled with the soil, is putrefying.

In the deserted suburb, full of remains once alive, once alive and young, with its wide avenues lined with modern houses whose well-being is obvious in that suburb, Argüelles, bright and laughing, with its double row of trees, its shops with large windows, its lines of tall buildings yellow and ruddy, cement and brick, there was no one. Now and again a motor-car or a lorry carried food and munitions towards Moncloa. The tramways did not come so far, but turned back towards the centre of the town much lower down. The glass and the reflectors of the street-lamps were broken; the awnings of the shops broken; the monument to Argüelles chipped, and over everything—silence; that monstrous silence in the centre of a suburb was one of the grimmest forms of the terror. There were no dead in the streets, no fugitive families, no one who could give a living expression to the terror—which made it even stronger, as there was no outlet for the feelings. The streets there were desolate, the roads leading nowhere, were open, awaiting no one. Often I have had that experience of dread in large cities at dawn, when the light is beginning to break, and everything in the city is silent and empty. I used

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to imagine that it was not five in the morning, but seven at night. It was easy to get the feeling of dusk—the gradations of light are much the same—in a real deserted city, abandoned, the prey of an epidemic like those described in histories of the Middle Ages. The pervading desolation reached one's soul, already desolate. Not a voice, not a lamentation which might focus the pain. The pain was inconcrete, vague and immense, as human pain might be before man existed, the human pain of not existing. Absence. The feeling of absolute absence.

I went up towards Ríos Rosas by the outer paths of Vallehermoso, listening to the noises of my footsteps in the empty corners, when I met another man. He was more than seventy years old; he looked tough, but simple-minded. A thin white beard, not so much a beard as a sign of physical neglect. His hands were hidden, and his head peered out from between his narrow shoulders in a tortoise-like fashion. He looked about him as if surprised, but as if he had a stiff neck. There were pieces of broken glass in his clothes and dust blown on them by the winds of the cross-roads. The beggar hesitated at a door, looked in, and came out and reappeared with a childish terror in his eyes, murmuring a phrase which might have been an excuse or a question:

'There is no one.'

He would have gone into one of the houses to sit on a sofa or sleep in a bed, but he had a great social respect for the lamps of the entrance halls. And he came out, murmuring in his childish voice:

'There is no one.'

The cold was making the mud crackle under my boots. The old man shuffled in his string-soled shoes through which a bony toe protruded, mottled red and purple. To look into the porches he had to raise his head, and a knotted tendon could be seen passing down from between his white hair and beard to disappear in the opening of his old jacket.

'There is no one.'

Probably he was the only beggar left in Madrid, the most miserable, the most helpless. Unaware that the suburb was lashed with bullets day and night, he could have had no one

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in the world to speak to him even occasionally. He looked at me, and shuffling to one side held out his hand. I asked him where he was going, and looking vaguely round about he said:

'That way, by the mercy of God.'

'There is not longer a God.'

'Eh?' he asked, not understanding.

'They have killed him, have killed God.'

'That isn't the law. Who is going to kill God?'

'That isn't the law.' No one had made a law for him, but out of the depths of his wretchedness he had made a law for God.

The aeroplanes came over from Tetuan, and the first bombs shook the ground under our feet. The beggar must have been hungry, and showed it, like a dog, by searching anxiously on the ground. I warned him that if he stayed there much longer a shell would kill him, and he hurried off with comical speed. His legs were not quick enough for his wish to flee. But when he reached the corner, he twisted into a place even more dangerous. I called to him, but either he didn't hear me or had no trust in me. There he remained, a beggar in the desert, perhaps by some instinct seeking a place where he could die in the warmth of a glory which he would never know. The glory of a people giving its life for its liberty, and desiring that liberty, among other reasons, to make impossible such vileness and wretchedness in old age.

I went to a house in Lope de Rueda Street where I had an appointment with the friend whom I had told to look after the wounded fascist. I was turning over old problems in my mind. I did not wish to surrender myself to any kind of determinism, any fatalism either biological or religious. I wondered if it were possible for the extraordinary cynicism of the fascists ever to dominate the humanitarian idealism of the people. Was not all that, including the concept of humanity, I said to myself, 'artificial and false?' Were not idealistic illusions as unfounded as the others, those of our enemies? And was it possible that the fear of chaos which we attributed to nature was only our own fear of nature which itself is chaos? For if we accept that humanity regards its preservation and

improvement as a vital necessity, then we have also to accept that men and their civilization, their organizations and societies are following a final end, an imposed destiny, and in that case we reach the absurdity of attributing purpose to the cosmos. Among absurdities that would be the greatest. But, on the other hand, there is no doubt but that things and beings strive to assert themselves, and from that point of view I saw clearly the fascist position and ours. The fascist gyrates round two acquired ideas; personality and power. He sacrifices everything to them. He denies everything which implies human qualities with ends in themselves. We others live, think and fight, not under the rule of two acquired ideas, but of innate feelings, humanism—social relations based on natural equality. Our behaviour and our ideas, contrary to theirs, are positive ideas. Humanism is the natural self-assertion of men just as form is the natural expression of matter. Human association is the assertion of the dependence of one man on the others. The personality of the fascist may be a disease of human association—and nearly always it is so—and his idea of power is a disease of the feeling of human solidarity, of social feeling. Will it be possible for this disease and this abnormal feeling of human relationship to impose itself on the world?

The aeroplanes came again. A woman of about fifty, with her basket on her arm, looked suspiciously at the sky and was ready to take shelter in a doorway:

‘Are they ‘chasers’?’ she asked with a smile.

‘No, they are trimotors.’

The woman started, and got into the angle of the porch. Without ceasing to smile, she said:

‘Not knowing is as good as not seeing’; adding, ‘I wonder if I shall find my house on the ground.’

Then she went on to tell me (for I also had taken shelter with her, until the aeroplanes should pass) that if they did destroy her house they would destroy only four chairs and a table with a broken leg, and that she would be sorry, because of the cat. The rest of her family were at the front; her husband in Peguerinos, her son in the Casa de Campo. ‘I have told them’, she said to me, ‘not to come home until we have won the war.’

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'When shall we be rid of this plague of "fashies", good God?' she added.

'Fashies' (Fachas) was the popular name given to the rebels, and more definitely to the fascists. The trimotors had passed. From the doorway we saw on the third floor of the house opposite two of the balconies torn away and a great gap in the façade.

We came out. The woman went off jesting, with her half empty basket on her arm. A few streets higher up, the first explosions sounded. Aeroplane bombs resemble exploding mines. Almost before the explosion, you can feel the trembling of the ground and the shaking of the walls. In the morning Madrid quivered under the aeroplanes which discharged their loads far from the trenches, far from the barracks, far from objectives of war, seeking women, children, old men, trying to negate cynically, devilishly, all we stood for.

I went on my way. Every time I heard an explosion I said within myself:

'It is the Beast, the Beast, which seeks dominion.'

I found my friend in a workman's house in a room separated from the rest of the house by a red curtain. The room was in shadow. She received me as if we had only just separated, although it was some time since we had met.

'Come in. There is no fever and you can speak.'

A working woman seeing me in a militia uniform had asked me:

'How is it going?'

'So, so; nothing more.'

I didn't know anyone in the house, but Madrid was then like a large family. My friend explained to me before I went into the suicide's room:

'That woman insisted on our bringing him here. She was one of those who was insulting him, but when she knew that he was wounded and losing a lot of blood, she took him into her house. The fear that if our people took him he would lose his life, has made her very anxious that nobody should know about him. She says that he is one of "God's creatures like anyone else", and that he can't be a fascist because if he were he would not be speaking against the German and Italian troops.'

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'And he, what does he say?'

'Always the same story. That we are going to lose, and that we are foolish to resist because it is our fate to die at the hands of his people. At first he didn't wish us to nurse him. Now he says nothing. This morning the woman changed his underclothes, giving him some of the things of her son who is at the front, and for the first time I've seen him looking grateful.'

I couldn't quite understand it, and I questioned her as to why the feelings of those women had changed so quickly, for it seemed as if they were going to kill him in the street.

'When I saw that they were going to attack him, I ran up to them. "He isn't drunk, he is wounded, he has had a bullet in his chest," I told them. Then they changed, first to being curious and then to being sorry for him.'

I had been unwilling to ask my friend how long she had been looking after him, as I supposed that she had not left him from the first day. This must have been the love she had half confessed to me on the day when she went to the barracks with me, and I returned to Guadarrama. If that were so, she must have invited him to my house, but then it was extraordinary that she had done nothing to get me away before the appointment. It all seemed natural and logical, and she was expecting him. It was all in her programme. The truth is that women are no use in the unusual, and yet they behave in extraordinary ways, and that ought not to happen. Exceptional things ought to be taken as if they were all in the day's work.

I could not fix my exact feeling about the matter. No doubt in the bottom of my mind strange rancours against myself lingered, for my own compassion which could not be real.

I went in and sat down by his bed. I saw that he was no longer insolent and provocative as on the first day. He argued just as before, but in a tone of apology. And the fact that he adhered firmly to his opinions gave him a certain dignity.

'What they are doing with me is beautiful, but simple-minded,' he said. 'They are looking after me because they think that every human being has a right to life.'

WE STILL WAIT

'That is so,' I said.

'No, no. Life is a privilege of the strong. The others have no right to life, but only to slavery. And all life can be summed up in one fact, the exercise of violence against the less strong. They are nursing me, and all the same the day that I am well again, I shall have the same views, shall have more strength than now, and shall go on using it. They are acting badly.'

'How can you say that?'

'Because I feel it.'

'No, you of all people don't believe it. If you did believe it, you wouldn't say anything, you would pretend gratitude, and try to get better so as to be able to help the Italians and Germans when they come into Madrid.'

He sat up, banged his fist against his knee. His eyes were starting from their sockets.

'If the Germans and Italians try to enter Madrid,' he shouted, 'I shall jump from my bed and shall take a rifle.'

'If they are fooled into giving it you,' I said.

He questioned me with great interest about the progress of the war. I told him nothing except that German aeroplanes had killed one hundred and forty children in the streets of Madrid, the day before. His face darkened, and after a long pause he said:

'Yes, the son of a neighbour of ours was among them.'

'It was your friends who have sent these aeroplanes here, and that woman and her neighbour, whose boy they have killed, know it, and don't hate you, because you are wounded. According to you there is only one name for that behaviour: idiocy.'

The suicide made a gesture of protest. Then he said as if replying to a thought of his own:

'But then everything would be the exact opposite of what one thinks and feels.'

I was unwilling to say anything to him. I shook his hand, and before going out told him where he could find me if the need should come.

'It will not come,' he said with assurance. 'Can they enter Madrid by that sort of work? A good lesson must be given to

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these Germans and Italians, and they are being given it by the son of this woman, you, her neighbour, who, instead of weeping for her dead boy, clenches her fist and threatens them with fury. All of us. We are going to show Hitler and Mussolini that we are better than they are, here,' he touched his forehead, 'here,' putting his hand on his heart, 'and there,' pointing to his sexual organs.

'Who brought here these Italians and Germans?' I asked him.

'Ah! That is the question! That will be the great question to be settled later.'

But I didn't wish to talk about that. I offered him my help if he should need it, and went off. I had hardly spoken with my friend, and I didn't see the woman of the house as she had gone to the chemist's.

On going out, I saw in a paved court close at hand, a dozen or fifteen boys playing with their bicycles. Eleven of these were large, of the ordinary size, and three very small. The children were playing at trimotors and 'chasers'. The small bicycles were the loyal 'chasers' and the large ones were enemy bombarding trimotors. Twenty or thirty other children were watching the game and shouting over its phases. First the eleven big bicycles came out and circled about freely. But suddenly the three small ones came out in a mad rush, sought them, chased them, dashed at them from the front or the side, and threw them over one by one amidst the cheers of the children, or got several of them joined into a tangle of wheels, legs and arms. When not one of them was left upright, the 'pilots' of the 'chasers' replied to the cheers, saluting solemnly, with raised fists.

A few hundred yards off, the explosions of the aerial bombardment could still be heard. Columns of grey smoke rose from the city and formed heavy clouds over the houses.

But as for arms, we continued to wait for them.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BANKS OF THE MANZANARES

For several days we had behind us the Hermits de la Florida. What in the end will happen to Goya's frescos and to the great head of genius, carved in granite, rising up between the two buildings, facing the meadow of San Isidro and the Casa de Campo? These places that Goya, in his old age, had seen spotted with blood, trembling under the platoons of executioners. Most of his *Horrors of the War* came from there; and there they returned a century later. Don 'Paco the Deaf', as his neighbours called him (peasants and workers), kept these scenes in the depths of his weary eyes, and when he got back to his house he drew them. Sometimes there was a man hanging from a tree with his legs cut off and nailed to branches alongside, which filled the paper with a revolting human horror, and gave the victim a monstrous grandeur which in its bitterness approaches caricature. At the foot he had written, simply, 'I saw this.' Another time he drew a wounded man, bandaged and on crutches, on sentry duty in his white sleeves, on one of those dark windy nights he loved so much, and put under it, 'Still useful.' Goya came from my part of Spain, and his dry words, full to overflowing with a condensed emotion, are familiar to us of Aragón, shock us less than they shock those of other provinces, because they express our own land, dry but fertile.

There in the Pradera de San Isidro, in the Casa de Campo, in Carabanchel, these horrors had come back again. There was missing only the commentary of don 'Paco el Sordo', which would have been the same, and could still be felt in the

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atmosphere; a good atmosphere of gentle greys and blues, to which blood was an outrage.

It was landscape with real clouds and with artificial clouds which rose from the ground under the shells, the aeroplane bombs and the mines, and sometimes hid the city, which seemed suspended over the tall platform of the Plaza de Oriente. From the viaduct to the Plaza de España, the old royal palace formed the edge of that balcony overlooking the Manzanares over a length of nearly a mile. Glass shattered to fragments, windows blown out, roofs dislodged were unable to obliterate its insolent serenity of colour and line. The Plaza de España (with its Don Quijote calmly rising in his stirrups to see better, and Sancho crouching on his donkey well protected behind his humble saddle-bags) disappeared in a wide green and yellow valley which descended by San Vicente Street towards Bombilla and the North Railway Station. Madrid rose again towards the Cuartel de la Montaña, half destroyed by German bombs, to a superb viewpoint, perhaps unique in the world; the Paseo de Rosales. That height stretched over the ruffled sea of firing to Moncloa and Cuatro Caminos, and gradually sank round Madrid by peaceful Chamartín, eight miles off. The height above the Manzanares of this old rampart must be about five hundred feet. At dusk the smoke of the explosions eddied in the autumn and winter evenings and seemed greater because the walls of stone and marble of the great western façade rose three hundred feet higher, between plinths and renaissance pillars. Below the viaduct the working-class side of Madrid stretched out in modest suburbs, very thickly populated, crossed the Manzanares and in a criss-cross of narrow streets rose until it met the outer streets of Carabanchel. All this western zone of Madrid was the scene of war. A Wagnerian scene, in which the horrors of Goya—with new cruelties, miseries unknown to history, born in the foul imagination of Franco, of Varela, of the wretched fascists—had a character of urban civilization, all cement, asphalt, iron railings and clever geometrical design. It was curious to see how the greatest horrors seemed to have the largest, most stupendous theatre. We fought with our backs to it. The enemy had the Wagnerian spectacle fac-

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ing them. All that huge tragedy seemed a parable by Goya. His voice was heard at dusk and dawn. It spoke in the rigid hand of a dead man, or in the empty socket of his eye. The guns fired day and night. Human ant-hills dotted the landscape among the trees, among the bare hills with dark and dubious passages between the smoking ruins. There where the human chains were stretched from tree to tree, from ruin to ruin, 'No-man's-land' began. For several days and nights we had in front of us men fallen headlong, with their hands and faces, all naked parts of their bodies, stuccoed with a flat lemon yellow duller than the white of the stones and the green of the trees, because these reflected light (which is the life of everything), but the skin of the dead men absorbed the light through its pores. One head, with the whole of a cheek, its ear and scalp torn away, exhibited its bones, dry and white and quite distinct, the temporal, the maxillary, the mastoid, as if it were a model in an anatomical cabinet. And the dark interior on which we could not fix our gaze, as our gorges rose!

The chilly bayonet of the dawns gave its first flash every morning, and was the first 'attention'! 'Hands up!' of our militia. The earth, which was motherly to us, soft and comforting to our militia esconced in their shelters, was corrosive and bitter for our enemies. By day the dull grey sky, lower than ever, was a huge sky without bird or sunbeam. An abandoned sky towards which leafless trees, stripped of their branches, stretched up their broken stumps, on each one of which the limb of a human body sought lodgment, as in a drawing of don 'Paco el Sordo'.

Behind the walls of an old factory ruined by the shells, three light tanks were drawn up. Sometimes bullets passed beyond the skeleton of the ruins, but often spluttered inside them. When one of the militia exposed his body for a minute someone would warn him, with the pleasant conceit of the Madrid people:

'Look out! You're in a draught!'

One of these 'draughts' might tinge irremediably with lemon-yellow our hands and our faces. The tanks were going to make sorties to attack the nests of machine-guns which were firing from the outer houses of Carabanchel. Every machine-

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gun and every cannon was prepared to go out to face the storm. Our artillery was firing from the rear. The high terraces, usually bright with colour in the sunlight, were now faded grey masses in the grey of the morning.

A motor-cyclist arrived and gave a written order to the officer in charge of the three tanks. These had a little window open at the side between the walls of steel, the armour-plating fastened with rounded rivets. In each tank the window framed a human face. Its edges grazed the eyebrows and chin. When the windows were shut, the face would be close to the armour. The drivers were breathing for a moment the pure morning air. Alongside the steel with its colour of dry mud, their skins were pallid, almost transparent. They were so intimately a part of the tank that the beating of their hearts mingled with the explosions of the engines. The officer bent to each window and gave the order. The first tank moved slowly forwards, and its driver gazed at us with impassive eyes. We raised our fists in salute and he smiled. Then the window closed of itself, and the tank turned to face the enemy positions. The other two followed it at an interval. Before the third started, the officer who had given the orders entered it. Behind that tank we four officers marched, until, a hundred yards farther on, we turned aside to enter our trenches, so avoiding a wide circuit.

Banks of soil supported by roped beams, wooden roofs protected by two or three layers of sandbags, loopholes for the machine-guns and for the sentinels, barrels of trench-mortars protected from the mud, in fact the arrangements made known to everyone by photographs of the European War. But there were novelties of quite a different kind. Every company had its committee, every battalion its commissary. That organization, more or less perfected in the early days of the war, had reached an extreme efficiency. The committees solved for the military commands most of the problems which usually arise on the margin of the strictly military business of attack and defence. Defects in the supply of munitions, food and clothing were foreseen and corrected almost automatically. So also with the sanitary difficulties and deficiencies. The choice of commissaries was a duty to which each of the parties

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gave the most careful attention; and each commissary, helped by the committee, carried out by his personal example, by well-chosen words, by the distribution of newspapers and leaflets, by explaining the orders of each hour, a work of cohesion, of unification and of political instruction of the most extraordinary kind. A good commissary occupied himself with everything, from the collection of empty cartridge cases—which the committees undertook to store and send to the rear—to study of the plans of attack and defence with the military commander and the general staff. It was the civilian spirit amongst the fighting men. The commissary's words had the wisdom of the older brother, the acuteness and prudence of the bureau of the political party, the common sense of the worker or peasant, who were working zealously in the rear. But above all, he gave a human example; the great example of prudence in the hour of reflection, of serene heroism in the hour of action. The military chief was obedience and discipline; the commissary was brotherly love in the brotherhood of war and revolution, better than the brotherhood of blood. Sometimes such love gains victories as great as can be got by strict obedience and the severest discipline. I recall the case of García Maroto, in the Casa de Campo. On the first day the advance of Varela's divisions could not be resisted in some sectors. In Casa de Campo the regiments of the Foreign Legion were attacking without sparing either men or material. When García Maroto arrived at the front for the first time, having abandoned his books and his working room, with his little revolver at his side and his commissary's badge on his breast, he found our vanguard, as unprepared as he himself, drawn up behind a deep natural gully which leads to the lake. The militia and the officers were waiting behind the trees, which there form a dense wood, for the coming of the enemy, who had prepared his way with an avalanche of steel and fire. That torrent just grazed the trench about eight or nine yards above their heads. García Maroto arrived, introduced himself as the commissary, and asked what the men were doing there.

'We must go up to the lake, comrades,' he cried out in his usual impulsive way.

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Some officers agreed with him, and came to his side. The others were silent. The slope of the high natural bank rustled and shivered under the bullets and the mortar shells.

'Don't you understand', he said, 'that if the enemy succeed in getting up there, they will inevitably capture all that?' with a sweep of his arm indicating all the sector down the river.

He started alone, certain that they would all follow. Only some officers went with him. The militia hesitated behind the trees. It seemed a mad attempt. Outside the trench there was hardly a square foot not swept by the machine-guns. But García Maroto went up. As he turned to harangue those who were hesitating, he was struck in the groin by a bullet. He was able to sit up.

'This is nothing, comrades. Up! let us go for them. Let us make an end of this gang of assassins.'

The militia went up then with a rush. García fell down again, and they took him off on a litter. The militia poured past him, their rifles clenched in their hands and they raised their fists, crying out in cold fury:

'Comrade! we shall avenge you!'

Until he left the Casa de Campo he kept hearing these words on all sides. That trench stopped the enemy, and forced him to retreat several times. And that position has not yet been abandoned, except to advance beyond it. The commissaries were foremost in attacking, last in retreat. The fact that, although not soldiers, they set an example of bravery and sacrifice, raised to a fever-pitch the morale of even the rawest militia. In all the sectors, in all the units, the labours of the political commissaries had made unity more effective.

The communist party had been crying out for unity for long. Like other communist watchwords, it was received coldly at first. Their insistence on it was considered tiresome and excessive. Then everyone began to talk about one kind of unification; a single military command. At last that was achieved in all the sectors of the centre, under General Miaja, Kleber, the hero of the first defence of Madrid, being moved to another sector. Simultaneously there arose a spontaneous tendency for real unity amongst the workers, which

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already existed theoretically, and had in practice secured the loyal co-operation of the anarchists. What seemed miraculous in Madrid to those who thought its defence a miracle was this unity. A few weeks after the beginning of the attack on Madrid, we saw that alongside a heroic communist leader like Lister or the 'Campesino', Modesto or Galan, we had such an anarchist hero, with special talent for leadership, as Cipriano Mera, who at the head of his legions of masons, perfectly disciplined, fought just as Durruti before him had fought, and as well as a young professional soldier. Mera was one of the first who contrived to fuse and harmonize the free voluntary spirit with the need for discipline. The work of the political commissaries was a leading factor in accomplishing that.

In our trenches that unity was a natural fact of which no one thought it necessary ever to speak. The communist commissaries had the good sense not to seek for their party the political successes which were too much in the air for anyone to forget them. There was no boasting, because the corporate spirit, when it existed, had not come to display itself as pride of party. But their single-minded wish for efficiency, of which I have already spoken, was recognized by everyone. The communists were functioning, politically and militarily, as well as it was possible to function, and as we saw functioning the Soviet aeroplane of whose delivery I have spoken. When an anarchist saw the Soviet 'chaser' descend on the enemy trenches, diving almost vertically, head-first, to machine-gun our enemies, he had to add to his delight the idea that inside the little aeroplane (short, plump and swift as a bumble-bee) there was a communist. And no one could doubt any longer that where a communist was at work, there was something useful and efficient.

Each battalion had its commissary. Each company had its committee. The defence of Madrid was carried on by wires linking the high roofs with the batteries, the trenches and barracks. Above the General Staff a Junta of Defence, and at the head of that a general of the people, Miaja, with a head of the General Staff also one of us; a Red. The miracle, for those who had to speak of miracles, in the defence of Madrid was completed by the assistance of the whole civil population.

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We felt that behind our trenches was a huge organized city where every word, every gesture, every movement, was directed to assist the defence. The old Liberal doctor who, in September, had done no more than to throw lumps of cabbage from the roof of the house against the windows of the inner courtyard which remained lighted after the air-raid warning signals, now worked ten hours a day in the first-aid stations, and another eight, voluntarily, superintending the scavenging of the district to lessen the risk of epidemics. He thought neither of salary nor of decorations nor of honorary diplomas. He went everywhere; gave advice here, an order there, and when it was said to him that he might now leave Madrid because his age brought him within the provisions of the Defence Junta, he was indignant, and, his face congested with anger, he said slyly that many young men of thirty were older than him, and that if everyone were to work as he did the war would soon be finished. One of the arguments he used against being evacuated was that at his age five hours of sleep were enough, and that he could give the rest of the time to work.

Behind our trenches Madrid kept pressing us on, encouraging us. Every militiaman, fingering the trigger of his rifle, had in his mind one house, one street, one corner of the mother city, now more than ever his city, without dukes, without marquis, without the anachronistic criminals who had been able to survive from the Middle Ages to our days because of the prudence, the purity and the honourable politics of the liberal parties who in all sincerity practised an idealism in which neither the so-called Christian Church nor the big industrial capitalists nor great landowners believed. Madrid had lost none of its peace-time qualities. A virile city, it met manfully and simply the extraordinary. The women had learned to sleep under the tempest. When it became more intense, they knew if it were an attack by us or by the enemy, and in which sector it was being developed. And although it was true that in the noise of the daily battle, any single one of the rifle shots might be cutting off the life of a husband or son, the thought did not make them weep, as in the early days, but murmur under the breath curses against Franco whom now

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no one thought of as the rebel leader, but as the shameless cover for German and Italian imperialism. The close linkage between our outposts and our trenches, between these and the second line, between all the lines and every street, every house, every abode, in Madrid, was the secret of our resistance. Sacrifices? Martyrdom? Certainly. All that was taken for granted. What we could not have foreseen was that children were the greatest martyrs. That was the only surprise the German and Italian fascists had reserved for us. Perhaps it was only what the general staffs of Hitler and Mussolini called 'total war'.

That morning we had to carry off two dead bodies. One had been a linotype printer. He was a sergeant, and a comrade, thinking that he was asleep, tried to rouse him, to help in distributing the coffee. The sergeant, who was huddled in an empty machine-gun nest, had fallen down to the bottom of the trench where he lay shrivelled as if he were of cardboard. That machine-gun nest had a history. The light guns of the enemy had dismantled it three times, and it had never held any machine-guns, always being empty! At night we fired from it and from other places with the only machine-rifle we had. And at that time, in the whole sector there were only two thousand men with rifles, and a few dozen with hand-grenades. Several times by night the enemy tried to find out what strength we had, and that poor machine-rifle we multiplied by firing it from many different places, which we changed as quickly as possible. They must have supposed us to have more than twenty machine-guns and so refrained from night attacks. Later, they made three attacks and were repulsed, as if we had possessed the twenty machine-guns. From then onwards 'No-man's-land' was sown with motionless bodies, slowly disintegrating, like the earth itself, to end in being, like the earth, inorganic matter.

The three tanks had advanced diagonally without reaching the enemy positions in front of us, as they were trying to take in flank a group of houses in Carabanchel which our troops were attacking simultaneously in front through the streets. The light artillery opened a direct fire on our tanks. Their shells struck about two miles farther back, on the embank-

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ment of the canalized Manzanares, where they exploded. The tanks arrived untouched at their objectives, and opened machine-gun and mortar fire. They disappeared among the houses in the clamour, at the time when the enemy heavy artillery, following its usual habit, began to bombard the opposite bank of the river. When they found that they were doing no damage by striking the stone embankment of Curtidores, they aimed higher, and fired at random into the centre of the city. When the militia heard the explosions inside Madrid, their faces hardened. I saw in their eyes their grief that the shells were not bursting on our trench. 'It is we who are fighting,' they would have shouted to the enemy. 'Don't fire on Madrid where there are only old men, women and children. The war is not to be settled there, in the quiet bedrooms where, maybe, a sick child is moaning. Neither our aeroplanes nor our artillery have ever fired except on military objectives. Of course, in our ignorance, we have not yet learned what 'total war' is. But an obscure instinct tells us that it may be precisely this ignorance which will give us victory.'

The sector presented all the possible features of a war across a stretch of three or four miles. Ground that was flat and denuded, more favourable to us than ever, open woods, large walled woods, hand-to-hand fighting, enemy block-houses against houses or the ruins of factories of ours, and fighting in the streets and windows of Carabanchel. The tanks returned from Carabanchel unharmed, their bellies emptied of their load of steel. When the officer made his report, he said that the tanks had destroyed three nests of machine-guns and had wiped out the enemy light guns with their complement, so that the militia in Carabanchel had been able to push home their attack. They had surrounded and captured about fifty Moors, in regard to whom a picturesque incident happened later. When they were being evacuated towards the interior of the city, they passed up Toledo Street surrounded by armed guards. Shells were falling so quickly in that suburb that they had to march hurriedly. Madrid women, seeing from their doors the body of Moors filing up the street, began to run towards the Plaza Mayor, crying out:

'Here come the Moors!'

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Others joined the first women, and the group became large. They fled, shouting out, believing that Varela's hordes were entering. But suddenly a woman began to stop them:

'Why are we running away? Our grandmothers threw Napoleon's French out of Madrid.'

She went on haranguing them, and when they were all ready to face the enemy with sticks and stones, they found that our militia were protecting the prisoners. Then all their anger turned to joy. They began to cheer the militia, who had much ado to clear the way. A shell which fell near made the women go back to their houses.

If I had a better memory I should mention here by name dozens of comrades, each one of whom in these days performed prodigies of valour in that sector, without any boasting, with the natural simplicity which heroism has on our side. I shall recall a few.

Cornejo. A young man of thirty years who put out of action two heavy enemy tanks, going towards them with a bomb in each hand and eight others in his belt. He went to within less than twenty feet of them, and, on his knees, threw his explosives under them. When he saw that they had stopped, he went up to the door of the first and knocked on its armour with his revolver, as if he were at his sweetheart's door. It opened at last, and out came three Italians, an officer and two sergeants, who surrendered their arms without hesitation. They then transmitted Cornejo's order to the occupants of the other tank, who also came out and handed over their revolvers. Cornejo took all six to our headquarters. The tanks were towed to our repairing stations.

Garcia Llobera. A man already mature, but who had not yet passed the age of prudence (in our war we found that the gloriously reckless, those of unlimited heroism, were often under thirty-five years old or more than forty-five; in the years of the prime of life there is much more prudence), was blown up, killed, with the remains of a bridge which he had undermined and exploded as soon as an enemy tank had crossed. He knew that he himself would be killed, but also that the hostile tank would be unable to return to its lines, and so would fall into our hands.

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Romerito. A lad whose age must have been between fifteen and twenty years, beardless, slender in appearance, always reticent and smiling. At first no one thought him of any account but on the very first day he was made a corporal because he displayed such surprising serenity and good sense at times when even the most resolute were wavering. Under his childish exterior there was the soul of a giant, as he showed many times, but specially one day when he went out leaving his rifle behind in our trench, 'lest they should hit me', and ran zig-zag to bring in one of our wounded men. Although the bullets were splashing over him, he was able on his way to collect two abandoned rifles.

A youth, I forget his name, but possibly he may remember himself from this record, was taken prisoner by the enemy with another man. The two were led to a deserted trench and ordered to jump into it. The fascists wished to avoid having to drag their bodies to the ditch, in the bottom of which there were already two decomposing human bodies. At the side of the ditch was a heap of lime. One of the two prisoners obeyed, and was at once riddled with bullets. The other dashed away. They fired after him, but he succeeded in reaching our lines, although wounded in both legs. When he was bandaged he refused to let himself be taken to hospital, waited until night, fastened a rope to his belt, and slipped off towards the enemy trenches. With hand-grenades he blew up an enemy munition dump 'which he had seen'—he had thought of nothing except that he 'happened to have seen it'.

But for the few weeks after the attack on Madrid began, everyone was a hero. For some deed or other, hundreds and thousands of names deserve to be mentioned.

At the gates of Madrid they all fought in defence of the democratic republic as usual; but everyone felt that the 'republic' was an affair of his own family, his own concern, a personal matter, his own. Days afterwards, the feats I have been describing were discussed in the private homes of the heroes, with pride, but also with that air of being personal and family matters, which kept being a stimulus to the defence of our city.

'Madrid will be the grave of fascism,' the communists had

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declared many weeks before anyone dreamed that Franco could reach Carabanchel. In all the homes of the people they were burying fascism under their breath with gestures and words as electric as those in the trenches. Madrid was burying fascism, not only Spanish fascism—senile from its birth—but also international fascism. It is enough to remember the declarations of the Italians and Germans who deserted from Franco's lines.

CHAPTER XXIV

ARMS ARRIVE—CONCLUDING STATEMENT

No one knew how or whence the arms arrived; nor did anyone wish to ask, pleased that the important questions of our organization should be settled in secret. Espionage had done enough harm for us to be unaware of the utility of such precautions. We began by seeing guns smaller than our 7·5, and guns larger than our 15·5 which, when they were fired, shook all the city. The militia of to-day, like those who signalled by their firing the rout of Napoleon in 1808, called the largest cannon 'the grandfathers'. To-day, as then, the people began its fight to the death against the imperialistic terror of Europe, to end in triumph. The smallest guns were 'anti-tanks'. We soon found piles of large cylinders of shining copper, towards the University City, towards the Bridge de los Franceses, indicating the first emplacements of these guns, against which efficient protective armour-plating has not yet been found. Franco persisted in his intention to destroy Madrid, trying to break the morale of its inhabitants by terrorism. But the atmosphere of the streets was the same as on the first day. Death came to the streets in the centre and in the populous suburbs, and was met by fists clenched in anger. The chance that it might come to them themselves placed a seal of stoicism on every face. The elegance of the street and of the people was to shrug the shoulders, without scorn and without sarcasm, but with a light and smiling grace, which continued to be the note of Madrid. I have seen a man stoop down in the street to pick up the fuse of a bomb of yellow copper, sparkling in the sun, and heard his companion advising him:

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'Good Lord, comrade, you needn't take the trouble! They are delivering goods at the house!'

And with regard to carelessness over risks, I myself have warned some children looking at an aerial bomb which had not exploded and had not yet been collected by the firemen:

'Take care; don't touch it.'

And a young rascal, fourteen years old, replied:

'Nothing will happen. I've been kicking it and it hasn't burst.'

But no detail like that, and many could be told, could disguise the reality. Reality held its imperative course, and every heart was attuned to it. That was all.

Madrid, where nothing had ever happened, was growing larger in the perspectives of history. An unknown wind blew through its shady corners, now poisoned. In its gardens where there used to be only children's games, were now felled trees, broken fountains, and perhaps a silent, terrified dog, sniffing at some dreadful rag. Houses, apparently undamaged, had foundered within—the bomb might have fallen in an inner court—and the firemen had shifted to the middle of the street great heaps of bricks, the frames of doors, tables and chairs smashed to fragments. The debris were like viscera vomited out from the mouth. But the people of Madrid looked at it on their way to the factory, the workshop, or the office without making any remark. The idea that the next catastrophe might happen to their own house had been with them so constantly since November 7 that they accepted it tranquilly. Too tranquilly, because the appeals made to non-combatants by the Defence Junta to evacuate Madrid were received with indifference. No one was in a hurry to leave. There were large empty houses which could be occupied when the persistent bombardment of one street made its inhabitants seek another, less enfiladed by Franco's batteries. That was all. The fact that a shell had entered a window, or come in through a wall, was regarded as an unfortunate natural event, and if there were victims, visits of condolence were made to the relatives as in an ordinary case of death, and sometimes, even, the neighbours on the next floor would not decide to move.

Rifles and machine-guns also arrived with the heavy can-

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non and the 'anti-tank' guns. Very few of the militia who had been expecting those rifles from the first day received them. Most of them had already been armed, in the course of those eight days, by getting them from fallen comrades. But when the new weapons arrived new contingents of volunteers were waiting for them. They were distributed rapidly and, when the last rifle had been given out, the city breathed quietly. Madrid was unconquerable. We repeated on all sides a phrase which could then be spoken for the first time by the militia on the centre fronts, 'we are equal to the enemy in the materials of war.' And as we are equal, anyone who ventured to doubt our victory would have been stigmatized as mad. Because in everything else, in cohesion, in discipline, in morale, we were already superior to them.

The nights in Madrid were longer than ever. At dusk the city was plunged into darkness until dawn. At night, the stippled firing from the fronts, machine-guns, mortars, artillery, closed each inhabitant in a resonant case to which his ears and his nerves had to become accustomed. Towards the end of November everyone was accustomed. They distinguished by the sound between our guns and those of the enemy; from the Plaza de Legazpi to the end of Vallehermoso Street, Madrid was a field of battle in which all the resources of the Great War, and many more, were employed. Every morning our aeroplanes filled the sky of Madrid with the groans of trimotors falling down, on a single wing. One of these mornings a 'chaser' of ours fell within the lines of the enemy. The pilot was a young hero, Galarza, a brave Spanish airman, who many times in his circle in the Café María Cristina, in the aerodrome, everywhere, had lamented the impunity with which most of his colleagues in the military air-force had conspired and prepared the mutiny. The enemy, whose noble and gentlemanly virtues were part of the ritual in all the official news and in all the radio statements since the beginning of the war, behaved to this prisoner in a fashion for which there are no words. There is no scoundrel who can fall so low, unless because he had become mad from knowing that he had fallen into the deepest depths of vileness and still wished to plunge into some deeper depth, a delirium of de-

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spairing wickedness. They killed Galarza, but, moreover, they quartered his body and put it in a box fastened to a parachute. Then they dropped it over Madrid, where it fell at the end of the Castellana. I am unwilling to dwell on this episode, photographs of which have been circulated widely. Enough to recall that a general staff, 'noble and gentlemanly', with sleeves rolled up and arms bloody, hacked off with an axe a man's head, arms and legs. Compare another fact; during the days before and immediately after that deed, the militia who were guarding two captured Italian pilots in the Hotel Asturias gave them half their daily ration of cigarettes. Discussion or commentary would be superfluous in the face of facts of that kind.

When I was transferred from the Casa de Campo, having gone to the barracks of which I have already spoken, I saw through the windows a picket drawn up in the courtyard. An officer led a man by the arm to the wall, and asked him to turn his back. The condemned man refused, and faced the squad. I left the window and lighted a cigarette. I tried to think of other things, but my ears were listening for the firing. I heard the officer asking him a question, and the condemned man replied in a slightly changed voice. Although I listened, I could hear nothing. 'The voice slightly altered.' I thought that if it had been one of our people, that could not have been noticed. When the extraordinary becomes habitual, even death is included, and when that habit has been acquired, death becomes a mere incident in the absorbing drama. Once I asked a comrade, mortally wounded, what he felt when he fell.

'A blow on the chest,' he told me.

That was the physical fact. Afterwards the fever which intoxicates and anaesthetizes, and then darkness coming, and the return to the night out of which all of us once came. Very little in comparison with all that is being struggled over on the earth. I thought that possibly the condemned man was making similar reflections. I should have liked to ask him if that were so, but in any case I was making them myself. It has been very difficult for me to base my actions and my impulses on a belief in the bad faith of other people, and in every

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fallen enemy I have always tried to see with respect a hero or a martyr. That may be a bad frame of mind for engaging in war, but without doubt it is necessary for consolidating peace.

I was still expecting the firing when the door opened and the officer brought in the condemned man. Two militia followed with drawn bayonets. The condemned man appeared resigned, but his resignation was not natural. There was something pathological about him which had made him lose his human expression, and given him animal features.

The officer called me aside. It was a Catholic priest who had been arrested a fortnight ago in a house close to the barracks, from which a hand machine-gun had been fired at our sentinel. When the house was searched, we found that two flats had been locked up and put under the protection of the German embassy, according to a sheet signed and affixed to the door. The other flats were searched, and the priest was found in one of them. He had hidden his soutane and his papers of identification, and, in civilian's dress, had been trying to escape notice. Everything was against him. He was the only person for whom the house committee could say nothing. They also found letters addressed to civil or ecclesiastical persons deeply compromised. They were dated before the war, and had no political interest as they dealt only with ecclesiastical matters. The priest was a man of about thirty-eight years, and had prejudiced himself greatly by trying to conceal his personality, as the mere fact of his being a priest was nothing against him. His correspondence compromised him, although not by any definite fact.

He had been tried and condemned to death, and the officer had put the obligatory question to him:

'Is there anything you wish to say?'

'Yes. I wish to say, and I take God to witness, that I am not lying; if you shoot me as a fascist and as an active aggressor against the army of the People, I protest with all my strength that I am nothing of the kind. But if you shoot me as a Catholic priest because of my belief and my office, I shall die contented and satisfied.'

The soldiers of the firing squad looked at the officer, who,

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instead of giving the order to fire, bade them put down their rifles. The officer brought the condemned man to me.

‘If what you said is true’, I told him, ‘you will save your life. Neither I nor any of the militia persecute anyone for their religious beliefs.’

One had only to look him in the face to see that he could not lie. He must have been one of those rare examples of the Church, humble and unobtrusive, who believe fervently all its dogmas and who are passed over for that very reason. It is very difficult for a priest who really believes in God and in good to get the length of becoming a bishop. For that, it is necessary to have got beyond such simplicities. That is well known in high places. I did not know how to prove what the priest said, but I was sure of his innocence. We postponed the execution, and asked that the records of the trial should be sent us. The priest remained under arrest in the guard-room.

Several days passed without a decision being reached. The documents condemned him. Meanwhile the priest fraternized with the militia in the guard-room.

One morning when I got up and went to the staff room I found on the table *Juventud*, the newspaper of ‘United Socialist Youth’. On the first page sensational news! In view of the recognition of the fascist junta of Burgos by Germany and Italy, the Spanish Government had given the German and Italian ambassadors forty-eight hours in which to leave Spain. I sent for the officer on duty. He, with militia—some of them had been on the execution squad—went back to the house opposite and forced the doors of the flats ‘protected by the German embassy’. They were to make a minute search. Half an hour afterwards they returned with overwhelming evidence. Handfuls of spent cartridges, revolvers, letters of espionage in cypher and in ‘clear’, with directions for the rebellion in Madrid. A complete arsenal, and archives of great importance which were passed to the office of Public Safety. The priest, in agitation, said that God would not abandon him. The militia alleged various things, some certain, others invented, in favour of the priest. Some had evidence of his guilt, others swore that on the day of the attack they had seen the flashes, and that they did not come from the direction

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of the priest's rooms. He listened to them with tears in his eyes.

We added a clause to the record, stating what had happened, and we told the priest that he was free. He asked us if we had enough confidence in him to admit him to the battalion as a militiaman, and we replied that there was no need to ask the comrades to say 'Yes'.

Everyone was pleased with the result, but the soldiers most of all. 'Comrade Priest', as they labelled him picturesquely, begged that when we returned to the front we should place him where the danger was greatest. We stayed two more days in the barracks. The enemy aeroplanes came over us each morning and threw bombs near us, but without succeeding in hitting our building. Several windows were broken. To prevent the others from being broken as well, we used to open them as soon as we heard the motors of the planes, as the bombs, even if they fell five hundred yards away, shook the shutters and the windows like the gusts of a hurricane.

The priest's equipment was completed in a few minutes. The militia found for him directly boots, a rifle, a blanket and warm coat. In other cases the difficulties in fitting out a volunteer were enormous, but in this case the militia solved them. Once more I felt an inner joy at fighting by the side of these pure hearts. 'Comrade Priest' was surprised. He was finding Christian virtues—perhaps for the first time in his life—in the most unexpected place. From all these extraordinary occurrences his first inference was the infinite mercy of his God, and new reasons for being grateful to Him. But we didn't bother about that.

A few days after we reached the front, they kept the promise made to the priest. He was taken to an outpost where he spent a day and a night with twenty others. Communists and anarchists surrounded him. 'Over there', said one of the former to him, artfully, pointing to the horizon, 'you will see those coming who, according to Franco, are defending religion, order and the family.'

'Over there' appeared waves of Moors with grenades in their hands and knives between their teeth, and, as they always did, interposing in their Arabic cries blasphemies

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and insults in Spanish. We drove them back. Many were killed.

Behind the lines that morning we had already burnt heaps of dead Moors, with here and there a German ('blonde Moors' we called them) reeking of gin and brandy. After the attack, the militia themselves proposed to remove 'Comrade Priest' from the trenches, because during the fighting he had remained motionless, without firing, in abject fear.

'I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it,' he said afterwards.

He wore an expression half of fright and half of shame. An anarchist mason explained his failure:

'It is quite natural,' he said; 'the comrade has been brought up from a child to other things, and his nerves won't stand it like the nerves of an ordinary person. I propose that we assign him to pacific duty.'

What was the matter with the priest was abject fear, animal fear. The others understood that, and helped him to hide it. We took him off and put him in the office of the General Staff in Madrid. On their visits, the militia never forgot to go to see him. One day I saw him chatting with a girl of the neighbourhood. He was dressed as a militiaman, and perhaps was trying to conceal his priestly state, and might even have been making love to her. I was in a car and he didn't see me. Days afterwards I told him about it, and he was a little surprised but not abashed.

'You find God', I added, 'in the most unexpected places.'

Perhaps he had found Him in that girl.

We all rejoiced at having avoided a crime. 'We do not need', we said 'to employ desperate measures.' A voice said: 'There are no desperate measures; only measures, nothing else. Everything that is useful is permissible. Nor are there abuses of force. Force always has the right to assert itself. And its abuse is only its normal use. If you had shot the priest, you would have committed a crime; that is only one of a few dozen aphorisms and dogmas with which you deceive yourselves into thinking that you have a humane morality; it is frivolous compared with the real fact, which is that the place of the priest in the trenches would have been occupied by an efficient soldier. In place of ten dead, the enemy would have

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had a dozen or fifteen losses. Don't deceive yourselves,' the voice added, 'in the end that is what will count.'

Perhaps it was true, but I cannot give up the other truth, and, on many occasions in life, I prefer to lean to the side of generosity. That is a virtue of the people. We could not have carried on the war with a mixture of cynicism and crime. Perhaps war is only that mixture, but we were not war, but anti-war. We were fighting for peace. Moreover, considering the matter of the priest on its purely utilitarian side, justice, honour and self-respect exercised by us systematically give us abstract victories perhaps more effective than those which Franco tries to gain by terrorism.

At the end of the month of December I was told that a militiaman on duty in the central dépôt of the Service Corps was enquiring about me. Some days later we met. It was (always shall I remember the hour and the place) at dusk in the late afternoon at the top of the Castellana. The clamour of the machine-guns rose and fell as the wind blew. Although I had kept the appointment with some feverish anxiety, I was very far from suspecting what he had to tell me.

At the beginning of these memoirs, which were written rapidly without any idea of literary construction, I had decided to say nothing about that scene. I see no way of avoiding it, although, in the second chapter, when I passed in silence over the circumstances of my family, it was in the belief that I should not have to return to them, in these last pages. But I have not the right to be silent about anything. The newspapers have reported that my brother Manuel was shot. The same newspapers have also written about the murder of my wife. The selfishness of saying nothing, of letting sorrow close in on itself, might be a selfishness not merely worthy, but even divine. But there are crimes which must be debited against the Beast; I know that thousands of my comrades have shared in my sorrow. Crimes and woes which serve to contrast the barbarity of Franco's hordes with the serene indignation, the heroic purpose (simple, without gestures or phrases) of the rest of Spain to punish these crimes and make them impossible in the future. I shall use the fewest possible

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words; I shall give only the bare facts. I shall silence, extinguish, the voices which rise clamorously and imperatively in my heart. I have written always with a kind of indefinite need to reveal myself completely and impartially to the world, and not to conceal myself. These facts (after all only two like thousands of others) are the most deeply rooted in my life. They came to me in the interview with the soldier, a militiaman who had come to Madrid from Valencia with a convoy of provisions. In Valencia, the friend who had been Controller of Forests in the month of July had sought him out to give him this message for me.

I was not alone in San Rafael. My wife and my two children were with me. A sister of mine and her husband were also with us, both of them of conservative views. When the former Controller of Forests came, he brought with him his two daughters, one of nine years, the other of five, and their maid. When the arrival of Mola's column was imminent, we met and agreed that the director, his wife and I should go across the mountains to Guadarrama. My friends' children were to remain in San Rafael as it was impossible to try to take them, or my wife, my children, my sister and her husband, with us. First, because there was nothing to fear for them from the rebels. Next, because from every point of view it would have been more risky to make them take a journey which only a practised Alpinist could do. Lastly, because we were firmly convinced that within a week or so we should rejoin them there. Similar considerations made it possible that the family of Señor Giral, the President of the Council of Ministers, would also stay in San Rafael after the arrival of the column. Everything seemed to be provided for, even to details which might be troublesome on the most unlikely hypothesis, especially as my sister and her husband eased our minds by saying that they would be with the children, as well as my wife, and that nothing could happen to them. It must be remembered that my sister and her husband were religious, Catholics and conservatives, as were all their circle of friends and relatives, with perhaps, the exception of me. It will be understood that we went off with our minds completely easy.

Whilst I was fighting at Guadarrama by the side of my

friends, the following happened on the other side of the sierra. The young gentlemen of the Falange who came with the column and preferred to go back to Valladolid as soon as they saw that the column was being held up by peasants at Alto de Leon, set to work to persecute, arrest and shoot everyone they suspected. The murders in the open street turned San Rafael into a horrible slaughter-yard. My wife and my children, my sister and her husband, and my friend's maid with his two daughters went to El Espinar, a small town three miles farther back. There they heard from the newspapers that my brother Manuel had been shot in Huesca. His only crime was to have been mayor, popularly elected, for two years. The day before he was arrested he had been warned by officious friends who spoke for the rebels: 'Get off to France, with your wife.' But my brother, a strong and sensible man, twenty-nine years old, whose intelligence and uprightness had offended the old carrion crows of provincial politics, to whom these qualities seemed insolent and offensive, refused. 'If I go off', he said, 'my electors will have the right to think that my conscience is uneasy. But I have no fear, and have nothing with which to reproach myself. I shall not run away. They can accuse me of nothing, and can do me no harm.' My brother, like me, and like the Forest Controller, left one thing out of his reckoning: crime. But a normal man in the events of these days, or in any other events of life, is unable to assume a will to crime in other people. The Controller returned to Madrid to take up his duties there. I went to Guadarrama to join my side. Both of us thought that in that way we would be risking nothing more than a temporary imprisonment of a week or so, the time we expected the insurrection to last, and we should be complying with our duty.

The murder of my brother (without trial, without accusation, without any kind of evidence), and what the co-religionaries of Franco were doing in San Rafael and El Espinar, spread terror in my family. As vileness is contagious with some kinds of minds, my sister and her husband went off to Burgos, leaving my wife alone with her children, my friend's children and their maid. Some days later they all went to Zamora where the family of my wife lived. But on their arri-

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val there, they learned that one of my wife's brothers also had been murdered. The other was arrested on the very day they arrived. Three days after his arrest, the head of the Requetés—a relative of my wife—came to her house and told her, with the air of one who knows deep political secrets:

'Antonio is no longer living.'

My wife went to the Civil Governor's office to ask for a passport to France for herself and her children. Not only had she never belonged to any political party, but her family had been regarded in the town as reputable people, liberal bourgeois. But the fact of asking for a passport after the rest of her family had been murdered (her parents had been dead for years) was doubtless extremely suspicious. Besides, in every crime there is the seed of another crime, only waiting its opportunity to germinate. Terrorism terrorizes those who have practised it, more than any others. If my wife were to go to France, she could also go from there to loyal Spain and relate what she had seen in a corner of Spain where the only shots fired had been fired by the murderers. They arrested her in the Civil Governor's office itself. The children, thus left derelict for the time, were at last recovered by persons whose hearts had not been contaminated. A month after her arrest, they brought a priest who confessed her, and then took her to the cemetery, where they shot her.

I learned from my friend the Controller that he had contrived to rescue his own children and the maid who was with them, and I went to the International Red Cross, and two months later they handed over my children to me. I wish to state here my gratitude to that organization, and personally to Dr. Junod of Geneva, who endeavoured vainly to get an explanation of the murder of my poor wife. They could not accuse her even of the charge they had made against her two brothers, of having voted with the Popular Front. These are the facts, without qualification, for that would be impossible. I have related them as they were told to me, in the fewest possible words. The words I could use have not been spoken, and I wish to keep them in the realm of words that have not been created, in the recesses of the soul in which everyone keeps dead hopes. The crime binds me more closely in an unchang-

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ing and eternal way to my people and to the fecund passions of the working people. When I knew what had happened, I went back to the front wondering if I had the right to go on fighting, in a war going on to its pitiless end, as an end had been made for me, perhaps for ever, of pity.

Even if I wished, I could not write more about it. Between my intimate feelings and the political passions of the masses, of which I am part, there are paths by which one may not walk at present. For me, and at this moment it is impossible.

I have just written that I had done with pity, but the fact is that I visited the wounded fascist again. I am sure that some day he will fight alongside of us, but that was not the only reason why I was incapable of denouncing him.

The hordes of criminal cynicism do not succeed in dehumanizing us. The only thing that is now dehumanizing is that which surrounds me.

My children, recovered, settled, joy which is divine come back to their eyes, I shall go back to the front.

Soon I shall be able to tell you about our triumph, although for me, in the circle of my private joys and sorrows, it will not be a triumph, but a compensation.

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